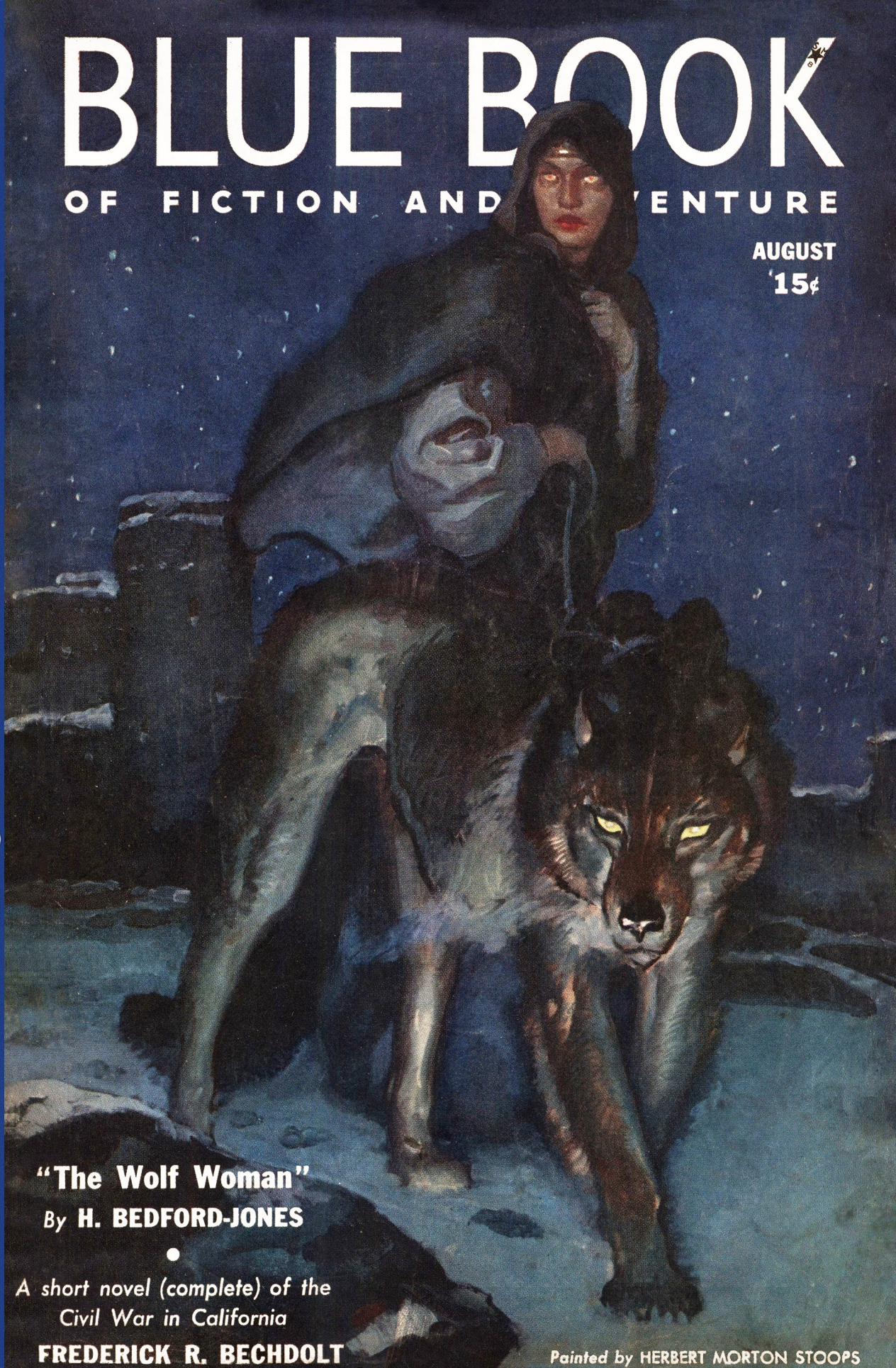


AUGUST 1939 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 69 No. 4

A true hell-ship now, the *Phœnix* bore on, with Connell and Cap'n Nell prisoners and desperately guarded in the cabin.

From "The Yellow Ship" ("Ships and Men"—No. XXXII), beginning on page 36.

KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

AMENHOTEP IV
Founder of Egypt's
Mystery Schools

This Sealed Book—FREE

Has life brought you that personal satisfaction, the sense of achievement and happiness that you desire? If not, it is your duty to yourself to learn about this rational method of applying natural laws for the mastery of life. To the thoughtful person it is obvious that everyone cannot be entrusted with an intimate knowledge of the mysteries of life, for everyone is not capable of properly using it. But if you are one of those possessed of a true desire to forge ahead and wish to make use of the subtle influences of life, the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) will send you A Sealed Book of explanation without obligation. This Sealed Book tells how you, in the privacy of your own home, without interference with your personal affairs or manner of living, may receive these secret teachings. Not weird or strange practices, but a rational application of the basic laws of life. Use the coupon, and obtain your complimentary copy.

Use this coupon for **FREE** *copy of book*

SCRIBE F. T. A.
The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
San Jose, California

Please send free copy of Sealed Book, which I shall read as directed.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____

The ROSICRUCIANS
SAN JOSE (AMORC) CALIFORNIA

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1939 VOL. 69, NO. 4

A Short Novel—Complete

Short Stories

A Much-Discussed Serial

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

McCALL CORPORATION
William B. Warner, *President*
Marvin Pierce, *Vice-President*

Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine
Francis Hutter, *Secretary*
J. D. Hartman, *Treasurer*

DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

Published monthly, at McCall St., Dayton, Ohio. Subscription Offices—Dayton, Ohio. Editorial and Executive Offices—230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—August, 1939. Vol. LXIX, No. 4.

Subscription Prices, one year $1.50, two years $2.00 in U. S. and Canada, foreign postage $1.00 per year. For change of address, give us four weeks' notice and send old address as well as new. Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in the Blue Book Magazine will be received only on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit. Printed in U.S.A.

Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1930, at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1897.

Prize Offer for Real Experiences

THERE is material for a novel in every person's life, it has been said. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of $50.

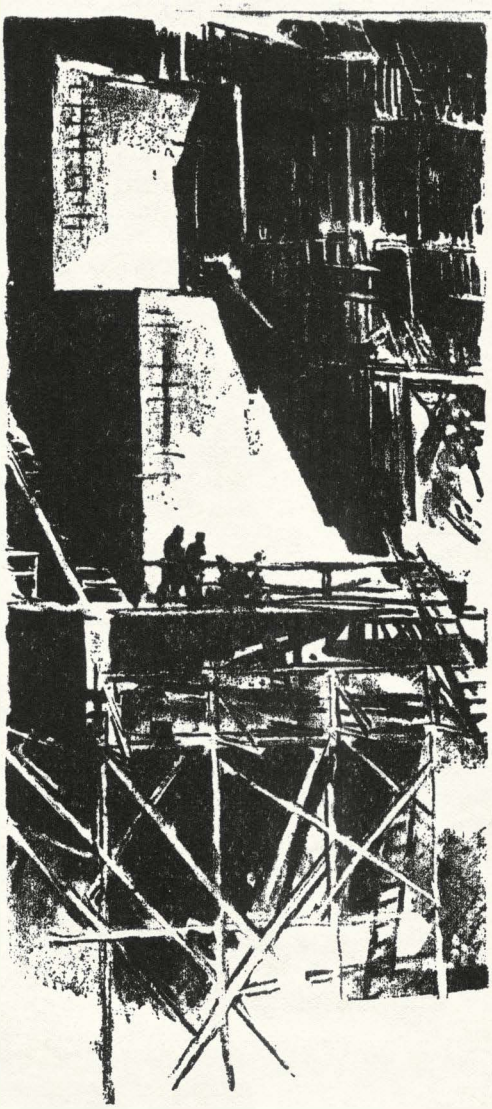
In theme the stories may deal with adventure, mystery, sport, humor, — especially humor!—war or business. Sex is barred. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable.

A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

Good Concrete

An able writer new to these pages here gives us the stirring story of a big man on a big job.

By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

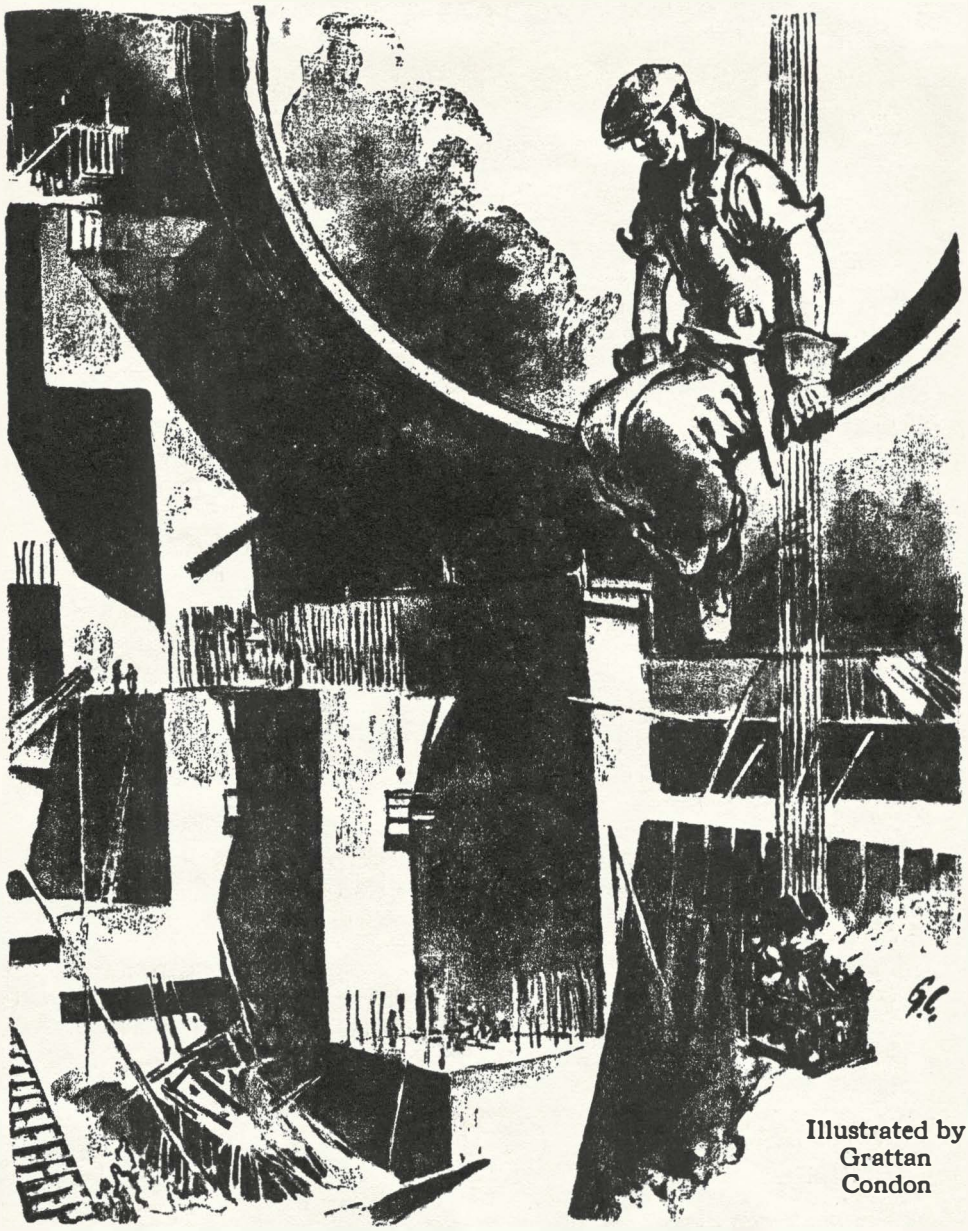


THE east and north walls of the small camp office were entirely glass, the frames low. Bo Donovon had designed it purposely; from where he sat on the board table, his muddy boots swinging, he could look down a sheer hundred and forty feet to the bottom of the glory-hole. The whole moving pageant was outspread there: ant-like men labored in the depths; larger, crawling insects of machinery wheeled and bellowed incessantly. Bulldozers roared in the cut on the opposite wall. From higher up came the sustained yet staccato thunders of many jack-hammers.

It was a big job, as these privately financed things went. The level of the camp office, which nestled on a bench on the outthrust western wall, didn't represent the entire height of the dam that would presently join rampart to mighty rampart. Eighty feet above, or two hundred twenty feet from bedrock, was the meander line of the artificial lake to be impounded there. It wasn't big by comparison to such colossi as Boulder or Grand Coulée. Yet the hundred-and-eighty-foot head would produce two hundred thousand kilowatts, which was power in any language.

It was Bo's biggest job thus far. In rare, stolen moments like this, when through the drive and roar of it would come a temporary lull, he liked to sit on the edge of the table, and look down at the glory-hole. Not egotistically, for he had come up the hard way, through bulldozers and hunky gangs and concrete, through blood-sweating midnight hours of wrestling with dope-book and logarithm. Not snobbishly, because he was a roughneck product of roughneck gangs; and knew it. At thirty-one he had seen sixteen years of it; the imprint of that rocky road was on his slender, muscular frame, on broad wrists and toil-scarred hands, on the hardbitten, genial cast of his darkly freckled face.

But he knew, deep within him, that the location of the camp office was symbolic of his career: he, too, had achieved a high bench, but it was a bench only, the crest was higher up. He dealt with facts and it was a simple fact to be met and ab-



Illustrated by Grattan Condon

sorbed, though humbly, with a species of awe. . . And still there was something missing, even in these exultant moments of dreaming. Those already at the pinnacle wouldn't understand why; they'd been born to it, or fallen heir to it, or had come up the easy route. The roughnecks he'd passed on the way wouldn't understand. To them he'd merely be swell-headed, success-drunk. What he yearned for was someone with the roughneck viewpoint—someone who knew the meaning of scars and the inexorable toll of the rocky road—who could look with him, understandingly, toward the heights.

Though the air throbbed with sound, he heard the door open at his back. He recognized the step.

"What is it, Pat?" he asked.

"Excuse it, please," she said, with pretended meekness. "So sorry, *Mister* Donovon. I didn't know you were in conference—all those millionaires and big shots standing around, patting you on the back—"

He hunched his shoulders. "Okay, Pat. Okay. What's up?"

"Grief. One of the county commissioners—Bogart this time—was just on the phone. All hot and bothered. He says the farmers are screaming about the road again. He says our trucks—"

"Heck with him!" said Bo. "We've dumped more ballast on that road than the county ever saw before. What do these hill-billies think we are—Santa

Claus, Incorporated? Phooey on 'em! Phooey on Bogart!"

"Shall I tell him that?"

"No," he said, with an unwilling grin. "Give him the works. Call him back and smooth his hackles. Tell him the Independent Power Company is always glad to coöperate with the county. Tell him the farmers are the backbone of the nation. Tell him we'll put a road crew and trucks on it in the morning."

"Yes sir."

A GOOD egg, Pat! He'd known her for years, on a dozen jobs. During the past three weeks, since her father's supply-truck had cracked up on the upper grade, sending him to the hospital, she'd been running the commissary and the cook-shack. And doing it well. The men swore by her. With seven hundred on the payroll, it was a man-size job.

She popped in again.

"There's a brass collar here from Colonial Cement, knocking at the gate. Mr. Horace Cowdron. He objects to walking down. Too muddy, y'know. Steve says how about it—shall he let this big shot drive down here to the bench?"

"Of course, of course," said Bo, with a touch of impatience. "Tell Steve to let him through. We're only ten days ahead on our cement. Might as well start the wheels moving on the next batch."

"Yes sir." Her tone changed. "Don't let him sell you anything else, Bo."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Nothing. Except that I don't like your friend, Cowdron. He talks too big. His eyes are too close together."

"Who else don't you like?" he said, suspiciously. "Cowdron's boss, I suppose—old man Brinksley? He's on your black-list, too?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He has too many millions. Colonial makes it too easy. He pats you on the back too much."

He grunted. "A nice, sunny disposition. I'll bet you growl in your sleep. Maybe you don't like Cora Brinksley?"

"I wouldn't know. We don't move in the same circles. I don't think I do, though."

He turned to glare at her. She was small and compact and yet generously curved; her freckles were golden and there were copper tints in her hair.

"Come here, you."

She came around, with pretended apprehension. He patted the table beside him. She perched there demurely, her shoes as muddy and scarred as his boots.

"Horace is still waiting," she reminded. "I haven't phoned back to Steve."

"Let him wait. We're about to discuss something. First,"—he leaned forward,—"look there, Pat. What d'you see?"

"Cobwebs. Also a film of good old Roaring River mud." She clucked sympathetically. "I know. Big shots notice those things. I'll have one of the bull-cooks wash 'em."

"What are you talking about?"

"The windows."

"No kidding, Pat. Be serious once. . . Look at that ol' gravity conveyor." The conveyor angled down in the near foreground, probing the depths like a giant, jointed finger. It was his pride and delight. "One yard every twenty seconds. Three yards a minute, one hundred eighty yards an hour, twenty-four hours a day. Good concrete, rolling down. Isn't that something?"

"Correct." She was suddenly grave. "It is, at that, Bo."

"The old-timers thought it wouldn't work," he exulted. "The puddlers called it haywire, a pipe dream; but there she rolls. D'you know what it'll do for me?"

"I was wondering that."

"Plenty. The conveyor made the job. The job makes me. When it's done, I'm through—out of God-forsaken wildernesses like this forever. I've taken the hard way for sixteen years, more than half my life. The heck with it. Hereafter I'm taking it soft."

"H-m-m," she said. "It's worse than I thought. I've seen Cowdron working on you, and Magnus Brinksley. I've been itching to warn you that they're just a couple of smooth, grinning wolves who've been circling and sniffing around, waiting till you're big enough to make a good meal. . . . But you wouldn't listen, of course. You're yearning for the flesh-pots of Egypt. You've caught the glint of a white collar, and it's dazzled you."

"Brass collar," he corrected. He wasn't boasting; his frank delight was tinged with awe. "Just to prove you're wrong about the big grinning wolves, I'll give you the lowdown, Pat. Never whisper it to a soul: The minute this job's done, old Brinksley's taking me into the firm. You know what that means. Colonial Cement is only one of the irons he's got in the fire—it just ties in with his engineering and promotion, a slice of the profits all the way down. He's growing by the minute; he's got the inside track with the

"H-m-m," she said. "It's worse than I thought, Bo. You're yearning for the fleshpots of Egypt."

politicians as well as the financial barons. He'll soon be as big as the Five Companies. The sky's the limit with that old buccaneer."

"For him, yes. But where's Bo Donovon's percentage? You'll be in an office, rotting there. Learning to be a yes-man. Getting fat and smooth and smug, like the rest. Drinking highballs. Playing golf with the other brass collars. It just doesn't make sense, Bo. You don't even talk their language."

"I'll learn," he said, stubbornly. "I'll soon know my way around. And I'll begin to live, to be somebody. Oh, I know I'm a roughneck, Pat. I was a puddler once, too. But I didn't stay down in the glory-hole. Certainly I'll absorb a few highballs. A little golf. I'll go the whole route—dancing, the Hunt Club, soup and fish. Why not? By the eternal, I've earned it."

HE looked at her keenly, and flushed a little. "You think it isn't in me? I can't make the grade?"

"You've already moved mountains and dammed rivers, Bo," she said, quietly. "You can do anything you've set your heart on—anything. Only—there's something wrong in the picture. I don't know what it is, but it's there. Why should old Magnus Brinksley show such a sudden interest in you—patting you on the back? Why should you decide, just as suddenly, that you've waited all your life for a break like this? Three months ago—"

"Three months ago," he said doggedly, "I wasn't ahead of the job. Now the concrete's rolling and I can look around to see where I go from here. You can't sit tight in this game. You can't—"

"Wait, Bo." She touched his arm, almost timidly. "Might as well hew to the line. Remember, I didn't ask you. You've been telling me—and I appreciate it. But I will ask you one question, and you can take it or leave it. Was it really old man Brinksley who sold you on this? Or his daughter Cora?"

His flush deepened at her query. Abruptly he strode to the window, then stood there, looking down, hands jammed in his pockets.

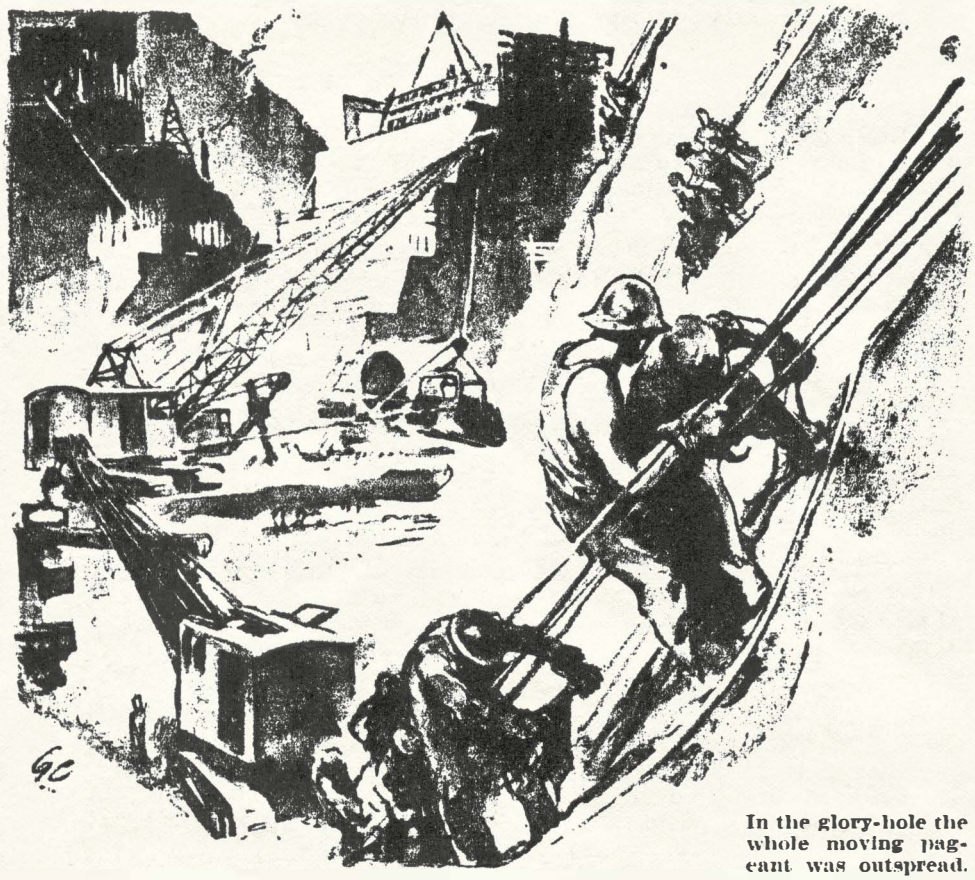
"Excuse it, please," she said. "You can skip it, Bo."

"No," he said. "A spade's a spade. I can talk to you, Pat. You've seen me come along. You talk my language. . . . Yes, it's Cora. I wonder if I can put over to you what she means to me, what she stands for?"

"I asked for it," she said, in a small voice. "I guess I can take it."

"Something beautiful and unapproachable, Pat. A symbol of something I've aimed at from the first. Call it the beauty of life. Call it success. Call it rainbow's end. I don't know what life is, what it's all about, what its final rewards are. Who the hell does? I do know this. Five years ago, could I have even talked to a girl like Cora, backed by the Brinksley millions? No—nor three months ago. If that's what I want—why not?"

"Why not?" she agreed. "It's funny, though—"



In the glory-hole the whole moving pageant was outspread.

"What's funny?"

"About life. How our ideas change about the worth-while things. Beauty, and all that. For instance, up to three months ago you thought a dam was beautiful. Remember how we stood and looked at it that night, in the moonlight, when the job was done at Bishop's Rapids? You said: 'There's something about a good dam, Pat. It lasts, too. It'll be there after you and I are gone.' "

He grunted. "Pure sentiment. Oh, there's professional pride, of course. A barber has that. Or a shoemaker. So what? I could build a thousand dams, bigger than Boulder or Coulee, and still, at the pay-off, I'd have missed something."

"You'd have missed Cora Brinksley, that's true. It's a little muddy for her, on the job. She never scrubbed a rough board floor, or slept in a straw-filled bunk. She—" She broke off, pushing away from the table. "Oh, well. . . Strength to your arm, Bo. Good luck and all that." She laughed. "Darn—will Cowdron be foaming at the mouth! I've got to phone Steve."

"Sure." He didn't look around. "Sure. Tell him to come down."

At the door, she said: "Sorry I disturbed you. I won't pop in like this any more. After all, what's our inter-office system for? I'll just press the buzzer."

"Press that buzzer, and I'll have it out by the roots," he threatened. "Don't be funny, Pat. You know I like to have you pop in."

"You do?" she said. "Thank you so much, Bo." And slammed the door almost viciously behind her.

NEVERTHELESS, she was soon back again. He was neck-deep in blueprints and didn't look up. Even if he had, he wouldn't have noticed that she'd had a good cry in the interval, powdered her nose and combed her hair.

"I was going to let you wait and suffer," she said. "It's too dirty a trick. After all, we were pals once. . . . Better put a necktie on. Wipe that smudge off your cheek. Unwrap your tongue from around that quid, and throw it in the gaboon."

"What are you talking about?"

"Horace Cowdron isn't alone. Cora Brinksley's with him."

"Cora?" He ran a finger around his open collar; his apprehensive glance swept the littered room. "Lawsy!"

"Take a look. There they are, coming down the grade."

It was true. Through the west window, at an angle, the grade down to the bench was visible. Cautiously, to avoid being hurled off the slippery crown by ruts and boulders, the long, once-gleaming roadster was creeping down. Cora's red slicker was visible, her red-feather Tyrolean hat.

Pat said, with a raised eyebrow: "The rougher environment, y'know. My deahs, it was *so* primitive—sort of."

"Beat it!" he admonished her. "Lord, what a boars' nest. Why in Hades didn't she tell me she was coming? Well, there's no help for it now. Send 'em both in, Pat."

"Yes sir."

TO Bo's vast relief, Horace Cowdron came in alone. Straightway the office seemed crowded; Bo felt under-nourished and frail. Ten years before, Horace Cowdron had been a star full-back at the university. He was overweight now—huge, booming and genial of manner.

"Where's Cora?" Bo wanted to know. "I thought she was with you."

"She stayed in the car. The road down to the bench scared her stiff—you know how these gals are." Horace mopped his face with a huge handkerchief and tossed two small bags of cement on the table. "Well, how's tricks, fella? Cigar?"

"Thanks, no." Bo was sorry now that he'd thrown away his chew; he eyed the samples of cement. "What's this?"

"Heft 'em," said Horace. He seated himself opposite, keen-eyed and jovial.

Bo hefted the samples. The bags were unmarked.

"Doesn't seem to be any difference."

"One sample's Colonial Standard Portland," said Horace, untying the strings of each. "The other's Nob Hill. Look at it—which is which?"

Bo shook his head. "What is this—a guessing game?"

"Taste it," said Horace. "You're an expert on cement."

"I'm no laboratory," said Bo. "Hasn't the association inspector passed on this?"

Nevertheless, he tasted it. At once, to his own satisfaction, the inferior grade was marked.

"It's mud," he said. "It's haywire. It ought to be run through again—maybe twice. What are you carrying such stuff around for? And what's a Colonial man doing with samples of Nob Hill?"

"Because Colonial happens to own Nob Hill," said Horace, his cigar uptilted. "We've got a hundred thousand barrels of it on hand. We're not going to run it through again; we're dismantling the plant. Know where we could get rid of some of it, Donovon?"

Bo shook his head, grinning. "You might try some of those Farm Security boys. It ought to be good enough to line irrigation ditches, and what-not."

Horace arose ponderously and circled the room. He peered out each window and opened the door suddenly, scanning the empty hall.

"What's your set-up here?" he said, coming back. "All this noise—we've got to talk too infernally loud."

"It's all right," said Bo, his grin fading. "There's a store-room and hall between us and the outer office. Speak up, Cowdron—what's on your mind? I hope I've guessed wrong."

"You've guessed right," said Horace. He leaned across the table, his cigar gripped between his teeth. "The old man sent me. He wants to find out how useful you'll be to us, Donovon. You probably don't know what the margin is in one-run cement. It's plenty."

"Go on," said Bo, quietly.

"This job here's a cinch," said Horace. "We buy off one power-company inspector, one man on the mix. Nobody's checking it after the mix goes through. This goes in under our regular contract—except that it costs us two dollars less, *per barrel*. One hundred thousand barrels. After conscience-money's deducted—and ten thousand should muzzle these two eggs—we split the pot three ways. Fifty thousand to you, seventy-five each for me and the Old Man. All on the q.t., of course. Our shares don't even go on Colonial's books. No use splitting a melon like this with the dear stockholders. Got the picture?"

Bo sat silent, looking steadily at him. A flush rose slowly into the roots of his hair. There were many stubs of pencil on the table; he took one up and toyed with it, looking hard into the man's keen, mirthless eyes.

"I know, I know," Horace soothed. "You'll get used to it. You'll get used to the way it's played in the big league. Just take it slow."

BO took it slow. He turned in his chair to look at the conveyor angling down, at the roughnecks laboring so furiously and methodically, far below, at the bulldozers bellowing in the opposite cut.

"H-m-m," he said, at length. "And if I don't—what?"

"Ridiculous," said Horace. He waved that possibility aside. "You'll play ball. You've been around a little, even in the bush leagues. You haven't come along this far without seeing the wheels move. You're smart, boy."

"I'm just simple-minded enough," Bo insisted, "to want to know what kind of a thorn's attached to this bouquet. If I don't?"

"You're out—on your ear. Colonial's big enough to do it; you know that. Squawk, and what happens? We laugh—a tolerant, understanding belly-laugh. *You* propositioned us, looking for a cut; *we* recoiled from it in pious horror. I'll swear to that. You'll have queered this job, sure. But we'll have queered you, too. You'll be through in the construction racket. Meanwhile, we hawk this stuff somewhere else. The only reason we picked this job is because it's close, and we've already got the contract."

His tone hardened a little: "Snap out of it, Donovon. You're dry behind the ears. How many years, at five hundred a month, makes fifty grand? . . . There's another angle. The Old Man assured me, personally, that you'd play ball. That is—he seemed quite sure of it."

Bo reached for the phone. "I think I'll call that bluff, Horace. I'll call the Old Man in Portland."

"Sure thing," Horace agreed. "He's expecting it. Only don't refer to it as Nob Hill—not over the phone." He grimaced. "Call it anything—blasting powder, for instance. He'll understand."

"Long distance, Pat," said Bo into the phone, studying the other man. "Magnus Brinksley, Portland."

THE call came through immediately. Bo said:

"Donovon speaking, Mr. Brinksley. Cowdron's here, claiming to represent you, to speak for you, on that blasting-powder deal. Is that correct?"

"Correct, my boy," came the Old Man's benevolent, sonorous voice. Bo had secretly admired its cultured accents. "You may rely implicitly on Mr. Cowdron."

"To the limit?"

"To the limit."

Bo hung up.

"Look, Horace," he said. "I know my way around in construction, yes. Not in your circles. Answer a few questions, please. From the roughneck viewpoint, you understand. The plain truth of it is that you and Mr. Brinksley are not, and never have been, interested in me, Bo Donovon. Except in relation to unloading one hundred thousand barrels of haywire cement. Right?"

"Oh, no," said Horace, obviously pained. "No, indeed. You've got a reputation, Donovon. We can use it."

"And you're offering fifty thousand for it?"

"That's just a starter, boy. Just a starter. You're going places with us."

"Okay," said Bo. "Here's another. Why did you bring Cora with you?"

"You've guessed that, too," said Horace, with a sardonic twinkle. "As a double-check. Sure—talk to her, too."

"I'll do that," said Bo.

He went out into the hall and through the outer office. When he returned, the flush had left his face; it was grim.

"Your secretary was in here, bustling around," said Horace, his cigar uptilted. "Not bad, boy, not bad."

"Bo!" Pat's delighted scream rose above the shouting. "This is *so* primitive—sort of!"

Bo grunted sourly.

"Pat's no secretary. She's an executive in her line, and a good one. Little things she does for me are out of the goodness of her heart. . . . Now look, Cowdron." He picked up a pencil and drew shapeless figures on a pad. "I'll swear I'm a little out of my depth on this deal. It smells to high heaven."

Horace beamed. "Sure. But fifty grand has an aroma all its own."

"That's what Cora hinted; I asked her what kind of man I'd have to be—what kind of engineer—to sit here and know concrete like that was going down the conveyor. . . . She looked at me as if I was simple-minded. Or joking."

"Well?"

"Be patient," Bo pleaded. "I'm just squeamish enough that I've got to take it in small doses. . . . This is the deal: You want me to run in one hundred thousand barrels of haywire cement. You know it's rotten. I know it's rotten. First, you buy off one company inspector and one man on the mix. How do I know you can buy them off?"

"It's my specialty," said Horace. "When I reach a man, he stays reached."

"You figure ten thousand will buy them?"

"Easy. Every man has his price. Those boys come pretty low on the scale."

"Pretty low," Bo agreed. "Yeah. But being a little higher up on the scale, our split, at two dollars per barrel, is two hundred thousand. Split three ways."

"Right. After deducting this ten thousand. Call that overhead."

"Fifty to me," said Bo. "If I won't play ball, if I can't forget all the things I've learned—"

"Come, come," said Horace affably. "Skip the dramatics—and sentiment."

"Sentiment," said Bo, his flush returning a little. "Yeah, that's a detail. . . . You're an engineer, Cowdron?"

"Oh, sure. Never followed it up. Swung into sales and promotion."

"LOOK, though," Bo insisted. "You'll understand this, being a kind of an engineer. What happens, after we've built the dam out of this rotten cement—it isn't cement, you understand, it's mud—and it begins to fold up?"

"Use your bean, fella," said Horace. "It'll pass inspection. You'll face it with standard stuff, the real McCoy."

"But I mean—the inside," said Bo. "Where the stress comes. There'll be better than a hundred-and-eighty-foot head, Horace. That's a lot of water. Remember your formula? Around ninety pounds to the square inch. That's a lot of pressure. When our outside stuff, the good stuff, begins to check and the water gets into the steel, and the steel begins to corrode—"

"Bah!" said Horace. "Your safety factor's reduced, sure. But the dam'll stand for years."

"Maybe. . . . Meanwhile, there's a valley below here that's fourteen miles long and up to three miles wide. All thickly settled. You got any idea what several hundred thousand acre-feet of water—a hundred-and-eighty-foot head, a lake maybe nine miles long—"

"You mean the farmers down below?" Horace squinted at his wrist-watch, with patient good humor. "The hell with 'em."

"The farmers," said Bo, and he, too, smiled a little, his eyes mirthless, "are the backbone of the nation. . . . Do I understand, Cowdron, that you're willing to take chances on the dam going out?"

"Of course not," said Horace. "The dam will stand. . . . And if it doesn't, we'll pass the buck to the geologists. Those boys will get out from under fast. There must have been a hidden fault, a schist, some abnormal structure that exploration couldn't detect. You've seen these whitewashes before. We'll take care of that. Don't worry for a minute about that end of it. . . . Good Lord, boy, we'll have ours, all tucked away and in the clear—whatever happens."

"H-m-m," said Bo, shaking his head. "It's no go, Cowdron. I'm too dumb to deal with, I guess. Somehow or another, even after you've explained it to me, that fifty thousand looks pretty small."

"What's this?" Horace demanded, with instant suspicion. "You're trying to chisel more than fifty grand from the pot? Just for turning your blind side to the mix that goes through? Guess again, fella. As a matter of fact—"

"No, I didn't mean that." Bo rose up, pushing the telephone aside so that the table was clear between them. He leaned on tough, toil-scarred hands, smiling. "I mean that there isn't any pot, Cowan. There won't be."

Horace stared at him, teeth clenched on his cigar, during a momentary silence underwoven only by the distant thunders from the job.

"I'll state it more plainly," said Bo. "Not a barrel of Nob Hill mud goes into that dam. Not an ounce. Not a whisper. Do you understand that?"

Horace swelled visibly. Muscular bulges marred his smooth cheeks.

"You wouldn't like to place a little bet on that, Donovon?"

"I've already placed my bets," said Bo. "I've heard your proposition. It's out." He grinned, pointing at the door. "You're next. Beat it. Out of the office and off the company property. Take Miss Brinksley with you."

Horace rose up ponderously, the veins knitting on his forehead. He removed his cigar and laid it on the edge of the table. He towered over Bo.

"Listen, you young whelp—"

"Listen to *me*," said Bo. "Up to now I've tried to talk your language. It came hard—harder than you know, Cowdron—but I think I finally got it. Now we've eased into a language that I understand. Roughneck, but plain. . . . I said, *get out*. I mean—*now*."

"Never mind the grandstanding, kid," said Horace, his eyes hard and amused. "Don't get tough. Not with ol' Siegegun Cowdron—and not with Colonial. You've been holding down a big job, but you're out of your depth. Just because the Old Man kidded you along, and li'l' Cora—"

"Sorry," said Bo, sadly. "I tried, but we don't seem to get together on it. Excuse it, please!"

THE sound of hostilities, mounting and colossal, brought spectators on the run. Pat was in the lead; they crowded in, spectators still, on the edge of ruin. The table was overturned, the chairs sprawled. In the midst of a snarl of blueprints and contour-maps, heaped up as by a strong wind, Bo rode high. His mount, half-buried in the débris, was Mr. Horace Cowdron, prone and bellowing.

"Bo! . . . *Bo!*" Pat's delighted scream rose above the thunder and shouting. "This is *so* primitive—sort of!"

Bo rose up drunkenly and with a great heave brought the erstwhile Siege-gun to his feet. The spectators made way, and through the aisle thus formed the late battlers strode, Horace in front, his disheveled clothing grasped firmly from the rear.

Through the outer office, down the steps and directly through the mud to the roadster the procession led. Bo thrust his man into the driver's seat and stood back, breathing heavily. Cora Brinksley, unaware of the epochal events preceding this moment, eyed her traveling-companion with horror and distaste. She looked at Bo—imperiously, at first, then with startled apprehension.

BO disregarded her; he said briefly to Horace:

"You're in shape to drive? You're sure? Okay—get going."

Horace turned the ignition key with trembling fingers and started the motor. A measure of coherence and sanity had returned to him; he said, thickly:

"I'll be back, kid. Don't think I won't. With an officer and a warrant." He peered at the others, heavy-lidded. "Remember this, all of you, because you'll be asked to verify it on the witness stand. We were alone in there, talking business. He made me a proposition. I refused it. He socked me. He can tell the rest to the judge. . . . Meanwhile, put this down in your li'l' books: there'll be a new engineer in charge here, in twenty-four hours."

"Maybe," said Bo. Horace had him, and he knew it. No evidence. No witnesses. Merely Bo's unsupported word against the towering prestige of Colonial. "We'll see, Cowdron. Meanwhile, I'm still in charge." He jerked his thumb toward the west. "Scram."

"Wait," said Pat.

They all looked at her, and she blushed.

"I ought to let him scram, Bo. I ought to let Colonial get its ears knocked down, too. But I guess I'd better not. . . . You, Bill,"—she turned to a diffident youth near by,—"what were they talking about in yonder, Bill? . . . You thought you were alone, you understand, Mr. Cowdron. You were sure of it. Listen, then. . . . Well, Bill? What were they talking about in there?"

"C-concrete," said Bill. He was a good man for his weight in a free-for-all but prone to stutter a little under stress. "He wanted Bo to run in a hundred thousand b-barrels of Nob Hill. The profit, at two dollars a barrel, was to be sp-plit—"

"How many ways?" said Pat, pointing to the next in line.

"Three. Fifty thousand to Bo, seventy-five each to Cowdron and—"

"Next," said Pat. "What else?"

"Face it with good stuff, Portland standard. If the dam went out, pass the buck to—"

"That's enough," said Pat. "You see, Mr. Cowdron, the telephone was on the table between you and Bo. You thought you were alone, and so you were. Only I'd put a stub of pencil under the receiver hook, to hold it open. I did it when I went in there—while Bo was out here, talking to Miss Brinksley—and you leered at me. You shouldn't leer, Mr. Cowdron. Not at an executive, and a good one. Isn't that what you said, Bo?"

"Pat!" Bo got it first; his battered face lighted. "You mean you had your earphones on? You took it all down?"

"Sure. Word for word. And the boys all listening on their phones. Some of it was pretty nice, Bo, toward the end. Where you said it came hard, but you'd gotten it at last. And for Mr. Cowdron to get out. After that—" her cheeks dimpled a little—"it got better."

"Quiet," said Bo. "You heard her, Cowdron. Four witnesses. Pat's record goes into the safe. It stays there unless and until it's produced in court. Get that? . . . But it won't be. The incident's closed. Think it over, after you've cooled off, and you'll see why. . . . Meanwhile, on your way." He placed a hand on Pat's shoulder. "Miss Brinksley, will you tell your friend that you'd better go now?"

"We'd better go, Horace," said Miss Brinksley, in a low voice.

SO they pulled out, and the group watched them go, standing there. They didn't stand long; it was raining again, and work waited inside. Bo and Pat were last. They stood together, wiping the mud off their feet on the small mat placed there for that purpose. They laughed; Bo hung his head sheepishly. Pat went inside. Bo glanced back and up at the mixing-plant, on the higher level, and cocked his head to listen to the conveyor.

Then he went on in. Everything was O.K. He could tell from the sound of it that the good mix was going through, as usual, one yard every twenty seconds.

The Wolf Woman

The strange were-wolf legend colors this brilliant story—the tenth of the "Trumpets from Oblivion."

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

NORMAN FLETCHER phoned me one morning. Even though one may know Fletcher well, to get a call from so distinguished a scientist,—one of the great men of the earth,—is to get a thrill.

"Hello!" came his cheerful tones. "Have you a stenographer in your office?"

"Yes," I replied in some astonishment.

He chuckled. "Have you a particular young woman there named Stephens?"

"Oh! Sure. Why?"

"I have a letter here from her."

"You have what?"

"I got a letter from her the other day, asking if I could reveal the origin of the

Pen drawings by John Richard Flanagan

werewolf myth. If you're not busy, will you bring her out this evening?"

"Of course!" I promised. "I've been meaning to get in touch with you. The Inventors' Club want to know whether you'll be good enough to give any more demonstrations—"

"No!" he barked, with an unwonted brusqueness. "Sorry; I've undertaken a lot of Government work and may leave for Washington soon. Besides, something's gone wrong with my apparatus. Apparently it's getting out of control; I'll explain tonight."

I hung up, thinking uneasily of the recent occasion when something had gone wrong with his infernal invention. Then I called Miss Stephens and she flushed when I told her of Fletcher's words.

"Perhaps it was terribly impertinent," she confessed. "But you had said so much about those experiments—and I did a thesis at college on the werewolf—and—"

"And all that remains is for you to drive out there with me tonight," I said cheerfully. "You'll have the last word—or the first word—on the werewolf subject."

She was demure enough as I ushered her into Norman Fletcher's laboratory that evening and performed the introductions; but her demure quality had solid subsurface foundations. In no time at all, she had Fletcher interested, for she knew her subject; everything that had been written about werewolves, or humans who took wolf form at night, was in her head.

"But where's your apparatus?" she exclaimed, looking around. "Working with ultrasonic and high-frequency waves, with electricity of all sorts—and nothing in sight!"

It is true that about this grim stone-walled laboratory was little to suggest the home of the most advanced electrical scientist in the country. Easy-chairs were grouped about his instrument-board, or controls; this, looking like the triple manual of an organ, gave forth a faint hum of tubes at heat, but seemed unconnected with any other apparatus.

FLETCHER settled himself before it and dimmed the room lights. To my displeasure, Miss Stephens accepted a cigarette and smoked with an air of enjoyment. She knows very well that I discourage cigarettes about the office, but she disregarded me entirely and seemed absorbed in Fletcher and his theories.

"Reduced to its essentials," Fletcher said, "the myth is that a person dons a girdle of wolfskin and turns into a wolf, to prowl at night; a woman is usually the subject, and as a rule it makes a grisly and horrible story. It goes back to the earliest of the Greek writers, even back to the Assyrians, and the belief still lingers in Europe today."

"Yes," said Miss Stephens. "I have Vetlugin's book on the Russian legends about it."

"Oddly enough," pursued old Fletcher, "the werewolves of the Christian dispensation were usually beneficent creatures, even touching and pitiful. While attempting yesterday to discover the origin of the legend, I chanced upon the story I'm going to show you. It concerns St. Odo, abbot of Cluny."

THAT his singular genius actually brought back scenes and sounds of the past, that the tremendous power of his ultrasonic mechanism could recapture, by a sort of backward television, real incidents from across the ages, we already knew. There was much about his process, however, that he had never revealed to anyone.

"Then," I said, "the characters tonight will talk old French, I presume?"

"No," said Fletcher hurriedly, for already the yellowish light was beginning to play upon the stone wall facing us. "My apparatus is somehow out of kilter; it does unexpected things, I regret to say, and I've no time to work on it now. Something about those new tubes and the iridium I've been using."

"What's that got to do with the language employed?" I asked.

"Everything. I can now get the sound alone, or the scenes alone. Yesterday I made a recording of the sound on this story and rushed it up to the university. Professor Hartmetz translated it into English and had the words recorded anew, rushed it back to me by dinner-time tonight, and I now switch the recording in on my sound-track. Ah! Pardon me."

A telephone was buzzing insistently. He reached out to the instrument and spoke. I watched the yellowish light dissolving the stones of the wall; the solid granite melted and began to disappear before our eyes. Suddenly Fletcher's voice sounded sharply.

"What?" he ejaculated. "What's that, Hartmetz? A horrible thing? Impossible! It was a lovely story, about St. Odo and the wolves—what? It was not?" Agitation suddenly thrilled in his tones. "Good Lord, man! Then there must be something wrong! Well, let it go. Thanks for calling me. I've got the thing on now. Good night."

I vaguely realized that something in his program had gone decidedly amiss; in the reflected radiance I saw him mop his brow and dart an anxious look at Miss Stephens, but she did not notice. She was staring at the wall. Those solid stones had now almost vanished, and as through a window, we were gazing out

"Take the track, Vic," said Indra, when the gate clanged shut.

upon a scene that was no picture, but reality in every dimension. I caught a dazed mutter from Norman Fletcher.

"Sanscrit, he says—Sanscrit! The old Aryan race, thousands of years ago; no, no, it's impossible. . . ."

A woman's laughter drowned out the mutter.

The scene before us blurred and moved, blurred and took shape anew—a vista of hills and forests, of squat, massive towers. Again everything blurred; the apparatus was certainly not functioning aright. The woman's laughter rose louder; it was no ringing musical peal of mirth, but the bitter laughter of hysteria. Suddenly the scene came clearly.

She was standing in a courtyard, laughing; a glorious figure against the background of rough stone and ancient thick trees, a woman laughing wildly, torn between grief and furious anger. The group of men regarded her with fear and awe. Her laughter died out and she put both hands to her face, as though to shut out some frightful vision.

This whole scene conveyed an impression of indescribable savage majesty; one sensed it, felt it in every detail. In this place was no delicacy or grace. The courtyard, the walls and buildings, were of enormous ill-fitted stone blocks; the trees were nobly massive; an air of spacious power pervaded everything, as in some dwelling of the gods.

The very doors, the stone seat, the beam-ends under the eaves, were gigantic and heavy-hewed. The weapons of the men bulked crudely large; spears with great bronze blades, huge splay-bladed axes of bronze, swords like beams of metal. The men themselves were built to match—figures of muscled strength and power. Outstretched at the woman's feet, red tongue lolling, was a tamed wolf of tremendous size, eying her sharply.

The woman lifted her head and bared her face. She was in white, a golden torque about her neck. Her radiant loveliness struck forth like sun through dark clouds; it was a regal beauty, a richly glowing force instinct with energy. There was nothing passive about her. Into her stark blue eyes came a flame that shook

her whole body, and her voice leaped forth like a clarion.

"Fight, Shatra! I'll lead, with you and the warriors following."

"Very well, but you know what it means, Indra," said the stalwart warrior, Shatra. "You know how they kill us; all day long we slay the little dark men, and at the end when we're exhausted, they overwhelm us. They're in countless numbers like ants. That's how your husband the king died; that's how most of our warriors have died. We are few, and they are like the forest leaves. Barbarians, rude and uncouth and swart—but they fight!

"That," he went on sadly, "is how our Aryan people have vanished. They slew in vain, and were overwhelmed. They drifted away and migrated, their civilization is lost; these little dark men have swarmed over the whole land. We alone remain, and now it is our time to die, if so you command."

THE flame died from Indra's face. "You have sworn to obey me and my son to the death," she said quietly.

"Our oaths stand; order it, and we fight and die—you and your son with us."

She caught her breath. "I see, I see! What are their terms?"

"They will not attack; behind our walls we can stand and laugh at them, killing them as they come. Their king gives a choice. Go forth freely and migrate, unharmed, seek another land as most of our people have done. Or else remain here in our stronghold; they'll send us what we need of food, but every man of us who leaves the walls, will be slain; women and children taken for slaves. We are the last of our people, Indra; the choice is yours to make and we abide by it."

She listened, wide-eyed. "Clever, these people! Let us remain here—and any who go forth, die! They're not anxious for any fight to the death. Come."

She beckoned imperiously and started across the courtyard. They followed her, mounting by the stairs to the stone tower over the gateway.

This was the donjon or central keep, the palace quarters of the dead king of a vanished people. From the squat tower, Indra could look down into the courtyard of the crudely massive castle itself, whose walls stretched afar over the hill. Within these walls was a small town. Outside was a vast camp stretching afar by hill and forest. And, from this camp, a score of the besiegers had come into the great courtyard of the castle, and waited there.

Indra looked at them. Hardy, swarthy men, different from her own people; smaller in stature, armed only with sword and bow. No stalwart hunters, like her powerful race, but numberless as the sea sands in that vast camp, an ocean of men who had flooded down over the snowy peaks and had driven her people out of their land. Small men, these Dravidians, yet they had conquered the mighty Aryan people and driven them into migration and exile afar.

"Perhaps it were better to go, like the rest," she murmured.

"We could take nothing, Indra," said one of her chiefs. "We must leave all arms and all treasure."

Her lips firmed. Her eyes flashed.

"No, then!" she exclaimed. "No! Keep our arms and our city; we, the last of our race!"

The chieftains assented and went to tell the Dravidian envoys. Indra, looking out upon the hills, perceived the deep cunning of these small people.

On the hills and slopes all about the town and castle, were palaces and chateaux. The Aryan princes and nobles had used these, for coolness in summer, for hunting in the winter; now the Dravidians occupied them, and the owners were dead. She perceived that the swarthy warriors thus held the place in a cordon. Their main host could go its ways and they would wait, grimly.

The summer had ended, autumn was whistling over the mountains, the first snow would fall any day now. Indra lifted unseeing eyes to the southward. There, over the vast lands that stretched to the sea and the ends of earth, the dark people had moved in. The Aryans had gone, scattered in migration after migration to the west and north, over the horizon to destiny unknown. Here among the mountains were the final remnant.

HER husband had fallen, the princes and great men had fallen. They had slain until they were borne down by sheer weight of numbers, like a man defying the tide to cover him. She, and the last of her people, and the boy who should some day be a king—her son; these were left. A king? Over what? There was no longer a kingdom. There would be no more a people over which he could rule, when he reached manhood.

An old councilor came to her, and pointed to the courtyard below.

"Come, Lady Indra! The king of these people comes; you must meet him before the gates and swear the oath."

"Eh? What oath?" she demanded.

"To observe the treaty; that none of our people shall war against his or leave these walls. Otherwise they die. He swears to let provisions enter freely, even to supply them, and to carry no fight to us. A great oath, with all the gods to witness!"

IT was so accomplished before the gates, in sight of all men, and with sacrifices to the gods. This King Savastri drew the eye of Indra. He was a man of thirty, proud of eye and bearded, very active and light on his feet despite his armor; his features held a certain humor, and men said he was merry and as a warrior unequaled. He was grave today, however, and Indra thought his dark eyes were hungry as he looked upon her.

So she swore that she would permit none of her people to make war or leave the castle. And he to his own oaths, and the people and the host bearing witness. It was published that anyone leaving the castle might be slain by the dark folk, without redress.

"Leave now, if ye like—your whole people!" said King Savastri, white teeth flashing in a laugh. "Leave, and die! The quicker it's done, the sooner we'll have your women."

His eye touched upon Indra as he spoke, but she turned away in contempt and made no reply to the taunt. Thus was the doom of the last Aryans sealed. They obeyed Indra to the letter, as they had sworn to do. Being a fierce people, they might have preferred to sally forth and die fighting, but she thought of the boy, and decided to temporize; so they obeyed, though it meant slow death for them all, cut away from the whole world.

But Indra sat in the great courtyard, as the days passed, with the huge tamed wolf, Vic, at her feet; and her blue eyes flamed as reports came to her. The Dravidian host had flowed away over the hills like an ocean wave. Plenty of them remained; their leaders dwelt in the little castles and chateaux, the dark folk made villages around each one, and their king, Savastri, occupied the massive hunting-lodge built by Indra's husband, three miles away. From here, he ruled his dark people, who had taken over the whole land. The autumn rains came down, and the first touches of snow, but little frost as yet.

It was said that everywhere in the country the civilization of the Aryan people was lost and ruined, for these Dravidians were an uncouth and ignorant race.

Indra listened to all and said little, toying now with the boy, now with the wolf. The prince was a child of four; he and the wolf were friends. A grim and fierce thing was Vic, trained to obey Indra and to defend her; the greatest of wolves, he had been captured as a pup and tamed, but his heart was savage. So large was he that the boy Shiva rode about on his back, though this did not please Vic overmuch.

On the afternoon of the first snow, with a gale sweeping over the hills and forests, Indra sent for her old councilor Ran, and for the chief warrior who remained, the stalwart Shatra. To the latter, she spoke briefly.

"Tell whatever officer commands the guard at the little postern gate in the east wall tonight, that he is to let me go out and watch for my return, without question."

"You, Indra?" exclaimed the warrior, astonished. "Who accompanies you?"

"Vic," she said. At his name, the wolf lifted head and eyed her, unwinking.

UPON Shatra fell fear and dismay. "Lady, think twice!" he said. "In the whole country, none of our people remain except women who are enslaved. If you're found abroad and taken or killed—"

"Prince Shiva will then be in your care," she said, and dismissed him. When he had gone, she turned to the old councilor.

"Would you break the oaths you swore to the gods?" he demanded, eying her keenly.

"I swore much for my people; nothing for myself," she said, and this was true. "I alone can make war upon these dark folk; I alone can avenge my dead husband and our lost cities and country, our scattered people. I know secrets none other lives to know, and ways of doing this. Let's have no argument, Ran. Are they sending us cattle tomorrow?"

"It was so promised," said Ran. "A hundred head."

"Good. See to it, then, that those who bring the cattle, are told a certain story they may carry back with them: The story you used to tell me, about our an-

"Lady, we have kept the peace; but your people have come slaying."

cestors who changed their shape at night and became ravening wolves."

"As ordered, I will obey," said the old man. "But what drives you to such extremes of vengeance and hatred? Why cannot you live like the rest of us—"

"Live until you die behind walls, or go forth to be killed?" she said in disdain. "If you must know, I shall bring about the death of that man who rules them."

"So?" Old Ran fingered his white beard. "Because of his look and his

words, when the oath was sworn—eh? I hear he is better than his nobles and leaders; in fact, a wise ruler, a king with brains—"

Indra flushed. "A king who shall taste the vengeance of the conquered! See that the story is told them. I intend to make that man Savastri suffer before he dies. No other can kill him, but I can. The wind howling upon the thick trees howls death this night!"

"He lives in the castle your husband built, with guards and warriors—"

"And I, who helped build that castle, know its secrets," she said, smiling terribly.

Indra, who came of a warrior race, could use sword or spear better than most men.

THAT night, respecting her signet ring, though they could not see her face, the guards at the little east gate let her out. She was clad in a robe of wolfskins, and the head was drawn over her head after the manner of hunters, with a flap down to conceal her face. She carried a hunting-spear, and the huge wolf Vic was at her heels. They saw her vanish into the trees where the storm tossed and the first snowflakes were drifting and sifting; and so closed the gate again, looking one at another with affrighted eyes.

Toward dawn, her voice summoned them, and the throaty howl of Vic. A torch was brought, and recognizing her, they let her in, but not as she had gone. Red was her spear, and the cruel jaws of Vic slavered blood.

"Do no talking," she ordered the guards, and went her way.

With morning, Dravidian warriors drove cattle into the great castle, as promised, and told a strange tale. Wolves had broken into the king's lodge, none knew how; one of their princes, and two of the bodyguard of the king, had been slain. The wolves had vanished again.

These men were told the legends of the royal house, and how certain of its princes could take the shape of wolves, at will. Undoubtedly, the ghost of the dead king had acted thus, taking vengeance upon his conquerors. With this cold comfort, the Dravidians were sent whence they had come.

Three days later, King Savastri and six of his chieftains came demanding speech with Indra. She had them brought up to the courtyard of the keep, and sent Vic away to the kennel he occupied; he was licking his jaws and his fur, this frosty morning.

Word spread that there had been more killing in the king's lodge, last night. Indra appeared, with Ran and others of the council behind her, and greeted the king. He saluted her, his bold, eager eyes never leaving her face.

"Lady, there is peace between my people and yours, for so you have chosen," he said abruptly. "We have kept the peace; but your people have come upon us in the night, slaying."

"That is untrue," Indra replied, and beckoned Ran. "Go and discover if any man left the gates last night or yesterday. If so, he shall die here and now for disobedience."

The old man departed, and she looked again at Savastri, unsmiling and serene.

"You are no liar," he said impulsively.

"I am no liar," she rejoined. "Now tell me what has happened."

"This is the second time," he said, while his chieftains assented. "Last night two of my captains were slain—mangled as though by wolves. A guard thought he saw a wolf-shape slinking through the rooms. Evidently your people are doing this."

"If so, they shall die; I swear it," she rejoined. "Is it possible you don't know the legends of our royal house? The ghosts of the dead are visiting you, great king; the ghost of my husband, whom your warriors slew, takes a wolf-shape in the night and kills. This is the old story, for my people are hunters and forest people."

"I have heard some such story being noised abroad," said Savastri. "All nonsense! One of those captains was killed with a spear, last night. Wolves don't use spears."

"SO?" She regarded him steadily, a cool smile of contempt in her eyes. "Great king, let me advise you to change your dwelling. Seek safety elsewhere. Let your warriors occupy the royal lodge and risk the vengeance of dead men; you can hide safely in another place."

The cool mockery of her words was bitter to bear, and Savastri flushed.

"I'm not that sort, lady. By the god Shiva! I'll lay that ghost, if ghost it be!"

"Shiva?" She started slightly. "Who is he?"

"One of our gods."

"Aye? It's the name of my son—there he is, now."

The boy appeared crossing the courtyard. Savastri and his chiefs regarded him, and their stern dark faces changed and lightened with swift admiration. The boy was like a radiant sunbeam. Savastri turned quickly to Indra.

"Lady, marry me!" he said abruptly. "Marry me, and your people shall go free!"

Her eyes chilled. "When I marry you, barbarian, it will be upon the couch of death!"

So barbed with disdain were her words that the Dravidian chieftains growled angrily, but Savastri only looked into her face and a smile leaped in his quick eyes.

"You'll be worth the having," said he. Before her fury could find response, old Ran came back and made report.

No man had left the city or passed the walls since the peace had been sworn.

"My warriors are not liars," said Indra. "Further, King Savastri, I swear that if any man leaves the city, I'll inform you of it; if any of my people undertake any action against your people, they break my oath and their own, and shall die. Go back, and hide from the ghosts of the dead!"

There the matter ended, and she had the last word; but something in the way she said it drew a speculative, searching look from Savastri. Perhaps he suspected her from this moment.

WHEN she heard the talk of her council and leaders, however, she went white with fury. To all of them it seemed that Savastri was the kingliest of men, and wise withal. That same night she went from the little postern gate with Vic, and returned long ere dawn; word came next day that four Dravidian chiefs, drinking together at an outpost, had been slain by a wolf—who left human tracks in the snow.

"My husband," said Indra to old Ran, "is having company on the ghost-path!"

"What good will it do you, or your people?" he asked.

Her face clouded.

"I don't know—yet. Only one thing matters to me, Ran; one person. Somehow, I shall assure his future; I shall find some way!"

"Prince Shiva was born to be a king, true," said Ran, scratching his white beard. "But the Aryan people have gone forth across the world, vanishing as a cloud in the sky; they are gone. They may found other empires afar, other races and peoples may spring from them, but they are gone. And we who remain here are doomed. Better a swineherd in safety, than a king without a kingdom or a people!"

Her blue eyes flashed. "King's blood will have king's name," said she curtly. "Three nights from now, my husband will be avenged."

Old Ran looked after her as she departed, and wagged his head sagely.

"A husband under the ground is best left there," he grumbled, "as many a woman has found to her cost ere this."

THREE days passed swiftly; evening of the third day brought snow blowing through the forest trees and a keen wind whistling over the roof of the world. In this bitter night, only a beast could find his way abroad.

"Take the track, Vic," said Indra, when the gate clanged shut behind them. Obedient to her word, knowing her voice and speech, the wolf trotted ahead as she released him.

She followed close, muffled in her wolfskins, with furred leggings, the hunting-spear in her hand. The snow now falling thicker, swirled about them, but the big wolf kept straight on, well knowing what way they went. They came at last to a thicket of trees; half a bowshot distant was the king's lodge, where a flaring cresset flickered in the storm.

Among the trees, they approached the building still more closely. Vic halted, beside a jagged rock that was rapidly piling high with snow. Indra put out her hand to it, and the mass of rock slid smoothly. Into an opening thus revealed Vic darted, but Indra called him back to heel. He obeyed, with a whine of repressed eagerness; the killer was aroused.

She passed down steps, along a tunnel, and to steps again; mounting these rapidly in the pitch blackness, she paused at a tiny gleam of light. She was now in the king's lodge, by a secret passage installed for emergencies; the others who knew of it, were dead.

She touched a panel and it slid aside, letting her look into the main room, where a huge fire was dying down on the hearth. The firelight showed a number of dim figures at the door; and a voice reached her, the voice of Savastri the king.

"No, no! I remain here with two guards, and the dogs. The rest of you, out to the huts and keep watch on the grounds! I'll have no woman taunting me, even if she were the most glorious

woman on earth, with skulking in safety while my captains run risks. I remain here, to meet the man-wolf if it comes. You others, stand watch outside. Go!"

They went, grumbling and protesting. One of them made some laughing remark.

"Aye," replied the king, a curiously vibrant ring in his voice. "From my first sight of that woman, my heart went out to her. I'll have no other, I tell you! There's no other in the world her equal, no other for me, and that ends it. Good-night!"

Indra, listening, caught her breath in quick anger. Vic began a growl; she reached down and silenced him with a touch and a word, then looked into the room.

"The dogs are uneasy, they smell something," said a voice. She saw a guard, and two large wolfhounds, though they were somewhat smaller than Vic.

"That may be," said the king. "Both of you take the outer room, with the dogs. I'll sleep in the room beyond. Keep a light burning in your room."

An alabaster lamp was taken away, and the place was empty except for red fireglow.

PRESENTLY Indra put her weight upon the secret door, and it swung aside. About the neck of Vic was a heavy collar of wolfskin like his own; she gripped it, and he emerged with her into the dimly lit chamber.

She did not hesitate. She was alone in the lodge with three men; two of them, and the dogs, must be killed before she could kill Savastri as she intended. She knew where lay the rooms in question; and, since she disdained to attack sleeping men, she went straight to them now —two sleeping-rooms at the end of the hall.

As she neared them, she halted, crouching. The door of the first was somewhat ajar, a light shone across the hall, a man spoke.

"I tell you, the dogs smell something —look at them! Bring the light. Let's take a turn around the place. I'll take the dogs on leash."

The dogs growled and whined; Vic's fur lifted under her hand, a savage throaty sound came from him. One of the men came out, bearing the lamp. He checked himself and put it on a stand.

"Forgot my bow," he said. "Go ahead. I'll come with the lamp."

He withdrew. The other came out, the two dogs straining on leash. They

"I'll lay that ghost, if ghost it be!"

gave sudden wild tongue, sensing the presence of Vic. Indra knew it was the moment.

"Take them, Vic!" she said, and loosed him.

The great shape went hurtling for the dogs. From the guard burst a terrible cry; he frantically loosed his dogs. He had held them an instant too long. Vic was into them with the kill-growl, murderous jaws slashing too fast for eye to follow. The three shapes mingled into one—a shapeless scramble of ferocity, from which flew fur and bright drops of blood.

Indra was darting forward. The guard, long sword sweeping out, struck at the battling animals. One dog was dead, the other down. The guard sighted Indra's figure, and slashed at her as he swung around. Her spear went through him, and she tugged it free as he fell. The second dog was quivering in death and Vic was up and whirling, with fiery eyes and blood-slavering muzzle.

OUT into the open came stumbling the second guard, bow bent and shaft notched. Seeing Indra, he started back. Vic went for him, and his bowstring twanged; he snatched a second shaft and shot. Both arrows thudded through the throat of the gaunt wolf, through throat to brain. The wolf's rush, however, took him at the man, leaping even as he died —leaping and slashing with cruel teeth. The guard was borne backward, and the teeth of the dying beast ripped open his throat and chest.

"Vic! *Vic!*"

A sharp cry, as Indra darted forward. She knelt in the pool of blood. The head of the wolf lifted slightly. His eyes rolled upon her in the lamplight; then his head fell and his eyes rolled no more. He was dead. Silence, and the gusty odor of hot blood, settled upon the place.

"So men and beasts keep company down the path of ghosts!" said a voice, amused, calm, poised: the voice of King Savastri.

Indra was up, spear ready—up and flinging forward. Savastri stood in the doorway, a dagger in his left hand, a long coiled whip in his right. He wore a crimson robe and was bareheaded.

She was at him like a flash of fury. The spear drove straight for his heart, a death-blow; but it slid away from armor beneath the robe. Across her face, half masked by the flap of wolfskin, lashed the heavy whip. Blinded, she staggered but struck again with the spear. The whip coiled about the weapon and jerked it out of her hand. The spear fell with a clatter. The lash burned across her arms and body, burned again. Savastri was striking with cool, deliberate intent, but striking swiftly.

A scream burst from her. She threw herself upon him with savage ferocity. He evaded her spring, caught the wolf-head above her head, and tore it away. The fair glory of her golden hair burst forth; and the loaded whip-butt thudded down.

She crumpled without a word and lay in a huddled, inert heap.

"So!" said King Savastri, gazing at her face. "I suspected as much. Ha! Now to see where she and the beast came from."

He caught up the lamp, picked his way across the blood-spattered floor, and in the main room found the secret door ajar.

Going back quickly, he dragged the great body of Vic down the hall and to that secret door; even for his sinewy strength, it was no light task. He cut the collar from the dead wolf's neck and kept it. The beast's carcass he shoved into the hidden passage, and closed the door again.

Returning to the frightful scene of death, he picked up Indra and carried her into the farther room; she was breathing heavily, and would be unconscious a long while.

PRESENTLY King Savastri opened the door of the lodge and blew a blast on his horn. Guards came running; picking out some of the captains, he took them with him to the grisly hall, and showed them what had happened.

"The wolf came, and the wolf went," said he, showing them the collar. "You see this? Now come, and see who wore it. The stories that we heard were true."

He took them into the farther room. There upon the bed lay Indra, senseless; now she was clad in a long white robe that Savastri had put upon her, after hiding the wolfskins. He beckoned his staring captains outside and closed the door.

"Here is the girdle." He gave it to one of them. "Throw it into the fire; she will never again be able to play wolf. Rather, she remains queen!"

INDRA opened her eyes to daylight and snow drifting in at the window. She lay in her own bed, in what had been her room in the royal lodge, and warm skins covered her. At her side sat King Savastri; he had been bathing her bruised head and face with a wet cloth. Now he leaned back, regarding her.

She stared at him. With a rush, memory returned; yet she was held spellbound by finding herself here and thus. She tried to speak, and could not. He smiled, leaned forward, and touched her forehead with the cloth again; his fingers were deft and very gentle.

"Apparently you had a bad dream," he said casually. "You've been talking about wolves ever since my guards found you wandering among the trees."

Her eyes dilated upon him. "Wolves?" she whispered. "Wandering? You devil! What jest is this? You know well—"

"Be quiet," broke in the king. "Be quiet and let me speak, for a little space. Here; if this will make you feel better, play with it," and he thrust a long dagger into her hand, then came to his feet and went to the window-opening.

She gripped the dagger and watched him, a flame in her eyes.

"Whatever you may think," said the king calmly, "you were picked up among the trees and brought here, by my guards. How you came there, how you left your castle, does not matter. If you're tempted to remember anything else, dear lady, it was all an evil dream. Let it be forgotten. I'm glad you're here, for I've something to say to you."

She lay like a trapped beast, wary and tense.

"Say it," she said in a low, hard voice.

He came toward her, smiling. "Indra, these people of mine are a crude, savage

lot of barbarians; I'm one myself. But I have sense enough to know that all the civilization, all the fine things, of your Aryan race are perishing in the hands of my people; this whole glorious land of yours is going back to the jungle. I want to save it. You can save it. You esteem it an insult if I speak of loving you, of wedding you because you're the only woman I know who is fit to be a queen, and my wife. But there's another reason. Our people, and your son—Prince Shiva."

The name drove into her, quieted her, held her intent upon him.

"Marry me," he went on in that calm voice. "Let your people mingle with my people, let them keep all they have and more, let them teach my people your Vedic Hymns, your gods, your ways of life and art and work. The remnant of your people can grow great again, among mine; they may be a sect, a caste, apart. A superior caste, not slaves!

"I have no sons to follow me, Indra," he went on. "But with you for wife, I'd have a son, and one whom my people would worship and revere. Your boy; let me adopt him, as the future king of this people. It was not I who slew his father, but one of my captains whom your wolf killed."

"My wolf!" Her eyes widened upon him, her voice came with a catch. "Ah! Then your sorry jest is ended!"

"By the gods, I'm not jesting!" Suddenly impetuous, he came swiftly to the bed and looked down at her, and he was all ablaze. "You're no liar, Indra; you swore oaths for your people, but there was no mention of yourself in them. That gave me the clue. And what was it you said—that you would marry me only upon the couch of death? Well, you're lying upon it now; death for you and your son and your whole people, if you make that choice."

HE dropped on the edge of the bed beside her, and threw out his hands.

"You have the knife; use it!" he said, hoarsely earnest. "The choice is yours. Here is my throat; kill me, if you like, if that will satisfy you! For I worship you, Indra; I worship you with my whole heart. I offer you myself, to kill or to take. . . .

"And with myself, your son's life," he went on swiftly, seeing her hand move and the knife flash. "Instead of death and ignominy, he shall have honor and a crown. Your people shall have life instead of death; this nation shall rise again—if you so choose! I offer a glorious future, worthy of you, and the name of Prince Shiva shall be enshrined among our gods. But kill me if you so desire. There is no one to interfere."

With one hand, he drew the edge of his robe over his face, and waited.

The silence of the room was stirred only by the rustle of the wintry branches outside. He could hear her quick, hard breathing, but no word came from her. Suddenly she moved and caught her breath, as though to plunge the knife into him; but he did not stir.

The knife clattered on the floor. Her hand touched his.

THE scene blurred and vanished. The stone wall came back into sight, the yellow light died away, the room-lights flickered on. Norman Fletcher turned to us, awe and amazement in his eyes.

"I'll be hanged!" he broke out. "This isn't what I expected to show you at all. It's not the same thing. This apparatus is playing tricks! But, my word! Did you get the meaning of what we just saw—the allusions to historic and ethnologic fact?"

"Rather!" Miss Stephens nodded, a tinge of excitement in her cheeks. "A scene from the dispersal of the great Aryan race, somewhere on the uplands of Asia, back before history began! And the legend of the werewolf, which curiously enough seems to be a purely Aryan legend, a sort of race-myth!"

Fletcher stared at her.

"Well, it might have been worse," he said slowly. "I see now why Hartmetz said the language was a form of Sanscrit. And damned bloody it was, too. I'm sorry you saw it."

Miss Stephens tossed her head slightly. "Why?" she rejoined coolly. "If you ask me, I thought it was fascinating, positively fascinating! All of it."

When we were driving home, I asked what she had honestly thought about it.

"Oh!" she said in her demure way, which I now realized was not really demure at all, but rather blasé, "he didn't fool me for a minute. I think he was just trying to shock me."

"Really!" I said, not without sarcasm. "And did he?"

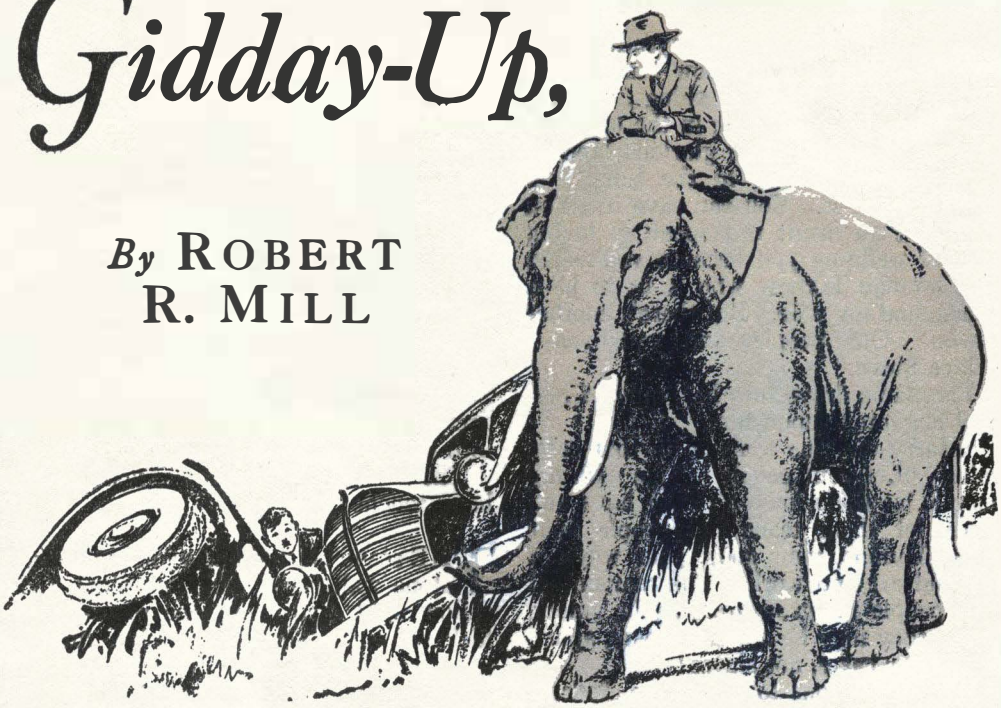
"I'm afraid," she drawled, "that poor Mr. Fletcher is behind the times."

I let it go at that.

Another picturesque story in this fine series will be a feature of our next issue.

Gidday-Up,

By ROBERT R. MILL



MAX PAYTON, top-sergeant of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, stood in the doorway leading to the private office of Captain Charles Field, and coughed to announce his presence.

"What is it now, Sergeant?" Captain Field demanded with a worried frown.

There was some justice, the top-sergeant admitted to himself, in the irritation displayed by the troop commander. In the surrounding countryside, dairy farmers were waging one of their periodical attempts to force the milk companies to increase the price of milk. To add to the problem, the farmers were divided into two camps. One faction was determined, regardless of consequences, that no milk should be delivered to the creameries. The other, while anxious to negotiate, felt that the loss of undelivered milk would hardly balance any possible increase in price.

The result had been a series of clashes. Farmers battled with farmers; trucks were overturned, and milk-cans dumped. Milk plant employees clashed with farmers, and more property damage followed. Then troopers had been called in; and despite all they could do, the temper of all parties had been such that there was an aftermath of cracked heads and blackened eyes.

All in all, it was a sorry mess, one of those things a police organization cannot sidestep, but which it cordially hates.

During the last twenty-four hours Sergeant Payton had made frequent trips to Captain Field's office, and none of those trips had brought joy to the heart of the commanding officer; so now Mr. Payton was prepared to duck.

"If you will just take a look at these papers, Captain."

Captain Field seized the proffered papers, and scanned them hastily.

"Humph!" was his verdict. "Just a simple civil writ of attachment." His ire increased. "What is the matter with the sheriff? Probably lost his bridge-work, and is afraid he will catch cold if he goes out without it."

There was more, concerning the sheriff, his ancestors, and even some prophecies concerning his descendants. Mr. Payton waited patiently until the outburst had subsided.

"If it please the Captain, he might be interested to read the writ."

"Haven't time to waste on a lot of legal flapdoodle," Captain Field ruled. "You tell me about it, Max. In plain English."

"The Captain remembers the carnival that played here last week?"

"And how!" Captain Field was off again. "The finest gyp outfit ever turned loose on the public. Run by guys who would cut your throat, and then curse you for getting blood on the carpet. But smart enough to hook up with the Order of Craftsmen, and talk a feeble-

Napoleon!

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

The State Police are sent to arrest a circus, and for Tiny David and his pals the subsequent proceedings are exciting indeed.

minded village board into giving them a license."

"Yes sir," said Mr. Payton. He made a pretense of studying the papers. "It seems as if they skipped out without making the last payment on the license, and the Order of Craftsmen feel they have something coming to them. That is why we get this writ of attachment wished on us to serve."

"Attachment!" roared Captain Field. "The whole flea-bitten outfit wouldn't bring five dollars at an auction sale, even with our wives bidding. What are they going to attach?"

Mr. Payton's face was serious, and his voice official as he pretended to read from the document:

"'*Certain properties belonging to said Joyous Days Outdoor Carnival Company: to wit, one male elephant, named Napoleon.*'"

Captain Field took it with the composure of an officer and a gentleman.

"My apologies to the sheriff. He is a smarter man than I am. He ducked this." Captain Field studied the papers. "Where is our little pal Napoleon now, Max?"

"The carnival is playing at Brookside, sir."

"That," said Captain Field, "is just dandy. Come with me, Max."

THEY walked to the living-room. An argument was in progress here, and there was nothing private about it.

Lieutenant James Crosby had the floor, at least for the moment:

"Maybe you guys don't like them—I don't, either; but the dictators have something on the ball. Every time a democracy tangles with them, the democracy comes home crying. The dictator can talk cold turkey. He says: 'You birds will do thus and so, or else—' The walking delegate from the democracy has to hem and haw, and then say: 'I will pass your words on to the boss, and maybe we can get a decision for you the next time the board of directors holds a meeting. Providing, of course, that the dear peepul don't hold an election in the meantime, and throw us all out on our ears.'"

"Maybe." This came from Sergeant Henry Linton. "But when the dear peepul, as you call them, get tired of being pushed around, they will declare an open season on dictators. When that happens, they should mount all the heads, because dictators will be scarce for a long time. How about it, Tiny?"

Lieutenant Edward David, the gentleman addressed, untangled two long legs and nodded sagely.

"Right, Linny." He turned to Mr. Crosby. "Those babies are morning-glories. They shine for a time, but they fade fast. History proves it. Take Napoleon—"

"I don't want him," Mr. Crosby protested. "He has been dead too long. You take him."

The deep voice of Captain Field caused a temporary truce.

"Don't argue," he warned them. "You both are going to get him."

"Sir?" The question came from both.

Captain Field showed no partiality. He gave the original copy of the writ to

Mr. David, while Mr. Crosby received an exact copy.

They read in silence, making unsuccessful attempts to mask their feelings.

"Napoleon," Captain Field informed them, "is now in Brookside."

"And where are we to take him, sir?" asked Tiny David.

"The writ specifies the county jail," Captain Field pointed out. "But we can't be too technical. Bring him here first. We have had a hard week. No reason why we shouldn't have a bit of recreation."

"Brookside," said Mr. Crosby, who had been doing some fast thinking, "is a good twelve miles from here."

"All of that," Captain Field admitted. "Unless they have moved it. Why?"

Mr. Crosby affected a casualness that did not exist.

"Nothing, sir. We will just drive slow, and lead the elephant from the back seat."

"But suppose the elephant is against the whole thing, sir?" demanded Tiny David.

Captain Field waved a hand airily.

"Those are matters to be settled between yourselves and Napoleon. But unless you want to start collecting unemployment insurance, don't come back without him."

Mr. David and Mr. Crosby sighed.

The carnival man scowled. "You aint getting no elephant from me! Paste that in your cowboy hat!"

In the troop garage, Mr. Crosby resorted to strategy.

"We might as well use my car," he said, in what he hoped was an offhand manner.

The owner of the car, naturally, would drive. That would put the elephant on the hands of his companion.

Mr. David realized this instantly.

"Your car has just been washed," he pointed out. "Why not use mine?"

Mr. Crosby discarded diplomacy in favor of direct action.

"Listen, Sabu! No matter which car we use, you ride herd on the elephant. Who made the crack about Napoleon?"

Mr. David tried to sidestep the issue.

"The crack about Napoleon," he declared, "had nothing to do with it. Our numbers have been up since yesterday afternoon. The Old Man said that he never wanted to hear the word *milk* again, and at supper we each drank three glasses."

"That may have helped a bit," Mr. Crosby admitted, "but when you dragged in Napoleon, you certainly accepted the people's mandate. Get into the car!"

Mr. David obeyed.

MR. CROSBY proceeded to enliven the early stages of the journey by comparing Captain Field with various characters of history, past and contemporary. These included Nero, Attila, Sir Henry Morgan, Cromwell, Hitler, Mussolini and several lesser lights. Captain Field, according to Mr. Crosby, was a composite picture of their several shortcomings and vices.

But the commanding officer had a champion in Mr. David.

"That isn't quite fair," he objected. "The Skipper at least has a sense of humor."

"What makes you think he has a sense of humor?" Mr. Crosby demanded.

"He laughs every time he looks at you," Mr. David declared.

Mr. Crosby's answering gem was lost in the flurry that greeted a troop car, bound for the barracks, driven by Lieutenant Charles McMann.

"What brings you out?" asked Mr. David.

"Milk war," said Mr. McMann. "And you?"

"We," declared Mr. David, "are on our way to get an elephant."

Mr. McMann gazed at them sadly, and then spoke in soothing tones:

"Probably a pink one. After you have found it, we will give you some nice

"How are you going to stop us?"

"Why don't you come along?" Tiny David asked. The

paper dolls to cut out. But don't you let it get you down. Medical science is getting results with mental cases that five years ago would have been considered hopeless."

As he uttered the word "hopeless," Mr. McMann stepped on the gas.

Mr. David looked at Mr. Crosby. Mr. Crosby looked at Mr. David.

"We must put Mr. McMann in our little book," said Mr. David.

THOUGH they managed to kill the better part of an hour in a general store along the road, they reached Brookside well before noon, and found the Joyous Days Outdoor Carnival Company on the outskirts of the village.

Seated in the shade near the ticket-wagon was an individual they disliked on sight. His suit was of a color that could have been used for a neon sign. His silk shirt was topped off by a cravat of colors that clashed with the suit. His dark hair was glossy, and plastered close to his head.

Mr. David consulted the documents in his hand as he approached.

"We are looking for Courtney Montague, the manager of this outfit."

The man in the shade yawned.

"That's your hard luck. He aint here. Left for New York this morning."

Mr. David was a picture of disappointment.

"When will he be back?"

"I can't tell fortunes."

"I can't either," Mr. David admitted. "But my pal can. What do you see in the glass for this gentleman, Jim?"

old man shook his head. "I can't run out on the show."

Mr. Crosby peered at the speedometer.

"I see trouble for him," he announced at length. "He is going to lose things. One of them is an elephant."

"And the other?" Mr. David asked.

Mr. Crosby resumed his study.

"The thing is so small that it is hard to tell, but it looks like a tooth."

Mr. David sighed as if an unpleasant duty loomed ahead.

"I am afraid you are right," he agreed.

The carnival man scowled.

"Wise guys, eh? Comedians? You and them hicks aint getting no elephant from me! Paste that in your cowboy hat!"

"How are you going to stop us?" demanded Tiny David. He thrust a copy of the writ in the man's hand with considerable force. "You are in New York."

They pushed past him, and made their way across the lot. Garish booths housed various gambling devices. Cheap dolls, and even cheaper candy done up in elaborate packages, were on display. In some of the booths bedraggled members of the company stared at them with sullen eyes. At last they entered a tent.

BEFORE them was a huge elephant. A metal ring circled one of the animal's front legs. A chain led from the ring to a metal bar that was driven into the ground. The elephant's brown skin was covered with a thousand wrinkles. His trunk swung restlessly to and fro. His huge ears flapped. He gazed out at them from small, wise eyes.

"Meet Napoleon," said Mr. Crosby. "He's your baby."

A grimy, toothless human derelict appeared from some recess of the tent.

"Hello, gents."

Mr. Crosby spoke under his breath:

"This must be Napoleon's valet."

He raised his voice: "Greetings."

The human wreck was so close they could smell his whisky breath.

"You have come for the bull?"

"Yes," said Tiny David.

The old elephant-man shrugged. "I seen it coming. This gyp outfit is headed for the rocks." Some faint spark of almost forgotten pride caused his bent form to straighten. "I aint always trailed with an outfit like this. I was with the Big Show—once. Best bull-man in show business. I got clips from *Billboard* to prove it. And you can ask any old-timer about Cal Peters. But what the hell! Booze done it. Booze and a dame."

Tiny David stood with his hand extended. The end of the roving trunk came to rest in his palm. He stroked it with his other hand, talking quietly to the elephant.

"Hello, Napoleon. How's the boy? Shouldn't fool you. I haven't anything for you to eat."

The carnival man was indignant.

"He aint no moocher. He likes you. Never seen him take a shine to nobody like this before. Say, you been around bulls before?"

"Not much," said Tiny David. "But I like animals." He studied the old man with new interest. "You're rather fond of this elephant yourself, aren't you?"

WHAT was almost a blush gleamed beneath the dirt.

"Me, I was with Napoleon in the Big Show. Then we didn't go out. Labor trouble. Looked like we never would roll. They sold Napoleon to this punk outfit; and me—I went with him."

"I see," said Tiny David.

"Yeah. He's a good bull. And smart. Many a night I seen him butt the wagons out of the mud when even the tractors was bogged down. Just show him what you want, and give him his head. No use yelling and clouting him, because most of the time he's away ahead of you."

Tiny David saw an opening.

"We have to take the elephant until this bill is paid."

"Yeah; I know that. His Nibs may be able to wipe it out by Saturday. He won't let the bull go. Me and Napoleon is the only draw he has."

"Why don't you come along with us?" Tiny David asked. "You can take care of Napoleon. I'll see that you're paid."

The old man shook his head regretfully.

"No dice. We all double in brass, and I can't run out on the show. Monty would have my hide, and nail it to a fence. But the bull likes you. You won't have no trouble with him. Besides, I'll wise him up what he is to do."

He stood at the elephant's head. He was bleary-eyed, dirty and disheveled. But as he spoke, there came over his face that look given only to those who love something dearly.

"You is to go with this guy, Napoleon. He is a right guy. You seen that right

away. Do what he tells you, just like what you has always done for me. It aint going to be for long. Monty will dig up some jack, and we will get you out of hock. Then me and you will be together like—like we always was."

He turned away abruptly.

Tiny David extended his hand. "Thanks. This is mighty decent of you."

"To hell with that!" said the old man fiercely. "I aint going to have him acting up, because then you guys might get rough with him."

Mr. Crosby asked:

"How about leading him from the back seat of the car? I'll drive slow."

The old man shook his head in the negative.

"Napoleon wouldn't like that. He don't like nothing ahead of him." He turned to Tiny David. "You better ride him. Gentle as a kitten. Tell him what you want, just like you would tell me or your pal. When you come to a turn, just slap him on the shoulder on the side you want him to go."

He unlocked the chain.

"Tell him to kneel for you."

Tiny David spoke in a quiet tone.

"All right, Napoleon. Kneel."

The big beast dropped to his knees.

"That's the boy."

Tiny David leaped upon his back. The trunk came around, and assisted him as he found a perch upon the broad back.

"All right, Napoleon. Let's go."

The elephant lurched to his feet, and started forward.

"So long," Tiny David called to the old man. "See you Saturday, perhaps. We'll take good care of him."

Napoleon made his way across the lot. They passed the ticket-wagon. The owner of the show glared at them, but said nothing. As they came to the main road, Tiny David slapped the elephant's left shoulder. Napoleon headed toward the barracks.

Mr. Crosby followed in the car.

THE elephant moved with a jerky but regular motion that was not hard for Tiny David to become accustomed to. He chuckled to himself. This wasn't so bad. To be sure, passing motorists craned their necks as if they were unwilling to believe their eyes. Let them!

Tiny David was grinning as he talked to his mount:

"You are a swell guy, Napoleon. I like you. We are pals. You have a long way to go, so take your time about it."

Napoleon loudly trumpeted his appreciation.

Mr. Crosby pulled the car to within speaking distance.

"All you need," he declared, "is a turban and a breech-clout."

Mr. David turned, and eyed him with considerable hauteur.

Just then they came to a bridge. Napoleon tried it with one front foot. He placed the second front foot on the structure. Only then did he cross.

"Much more sense than some people," was Mr. David's comment, as the car, piloted by Mr. Crosby, followed closely.

"The only thing I have against him," said Mr. Crosby, "is the company he keeps."

Mr. David balanced himself so that he could turn.

"Speaking of company, you might drop back a little. Napoleon and I can do very well without you."

"That," declared Mr. Crosby, "suits me fine. Maybe people won't think I am part of the show."

THE "show" continued on its tranquil way.

Then, as they neared a tiny village, there were signs of activity. Trucks containing cans of milk were parked along the road. Grim-faced farmers stood about them, talking and gesticulating. They looked up, stared at the strange spectacle, but made no comment.

Men were making their way across the fields toward the road. Some of them carried clubs. Tiny David recognized one or two, but when he spoke to them, they answered curtly, if at all, and made no comment about his strange mount.

Ahead, where a bridge crossed a roaring stream, a crowd was massed. Before he came to the bridge, however, he drew up alongside two troop cars, loaded with men.

"Whoa, Napoleon!"

The elephant came to a halt. Tiny David grinned down at them.

The troopers—Lieutenant McMann was among them—were not smiling.

"Better keep out of this, Tiny," said McMann. "No time for clown stuff."

"What's the trouble?" Tiny David demanded.

Lieutenant McMann shrugged.

"Plenty. Half these birds want to deliver their milk to the creamery. The other half won't let them. They have the bridge blocked. Turned over a couple of trucks, and are holding the fort."

Tiny David looked over the squad.

"What's the matter with you guys?" he demanded. "This outfit used to boast that for one riot it detailed one trooper."

Lieutenant McMann flushed.

"You weren't on the receiving end of the instructions the Skipper handed out. These birds are farmers, a bit misguided, but honest citizens, for all of that. There is to be no rough stuff. Those birds behind those upset cars mean to stay right there, and they have clubs. If you know any way to get them out of there without rough stuff, I would be glad to hear about it."

Tiny David, apparently, was giving the problem deep thought.

"It's by me," he admitted. "Well, you have your orders, and I have mine. Gidday-up, Napoleon!"

The elephant moved off toward the blocked bridge.

"Where the hell you going?" roared Lieutenant McMann.

"I have orders to deliver this elephant at the barracks!" shouted Tiny David. "Gidday-up, Napoleon!"

Napoleon broke into a lumbering trot.

Ahead of them, between the troopers and the barricaded bridge, were several hundred men, for the most part gathered in little groups. There were drivers whose trucks had been halted. In groups near by were men determined to prevent delivery of any milk to the creameries, but who had not taken their places behind the barrier formed by the overturned trucks before the bridge.

Scattered in the crowd were men with no active interest in the controversy, but who had been drawn to the scene by the prospect of trouble, and who would cast their lot with either faction, depending entirely upon developments.

All these men had watched the arrival of the elephant, first with disbelief, and then, after accepting the evidence of their eyes that the beast was on the scene, with active interest. They stood their ground uncertainly when the elephant started to walk toward them. Napoleon broke into a trot. Then things began to happen fast.

The men nearest to the elephant retreated hastily, climbing the banks along the road, and throwing away their clubs in their haste. Once safe on the bank, they paused. But now their desire to fight was gone, and they tarried in the rôle of interested spectators.

This was repeated as Napoleon advanced, his lumbering trot carrying him ever faster as he hurried toward the barricade. Tiny David leaned forward, talking in his ear.

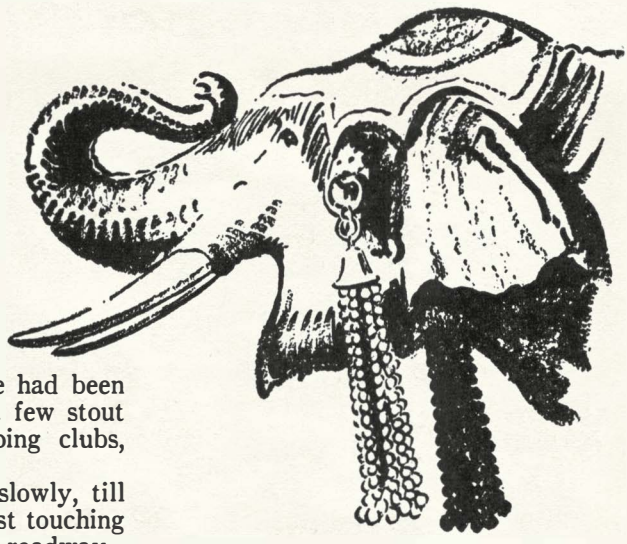
"Good boy, Napoleon! We'll haze them out of there. Steady now, Napoleon!"

APPARENTLY the elephant entered into the spirit of things with zest. He trumpeted a challenge, which was greeted by disappearing backs. His long trunk swung back and forth, as if seeking victims, but the crowds that had filled the road a few seconds before were in flight.

The barricade loomed ahead.

"Steady, Napoleon!" called Tiny David. "Whoa!"

The trooper pitched forward, and almost lost his seat as the trot changed to a walk, in obedience to his command.



"Napoleon's a good bull —and smart. Most of the time he's away ahead of you," the old elephant-man had said.

Behind the barricade, there had been wholesale desertions. Only a few stout souls remained, tightly clasping clubs, and shouting their defiance.

Napoleon walked forward slowly, till his great shoulders were almost touching a truck overturned across the roadway.

Tiny David leaned forward.

"Push it away, Napoleon!"

The great shoulders touched the truck. The few defenders fled in panic. The shoulders heaved. The truck fairly flew from the road.

"Whoa, Napoleon!"

The elephant halted. Slaps from Tiny David's hand guided him about, and another section of the barricade met the same fate. One light truck, set in motion by the mighty Napoleon, rolled from the entrance of the bridge, over the bank, and was swallowed by the river with a great splash.

Tiny David glanced about. The road and the bridge were open.

"Gidday-up, Napoleon!"

NAPOLEON approached the bridge, tried it with one foot, experimented with the other, and then marched across with ponderous dignity.

Tiny David glanced back. Lieutenant McMann had been quick to take advantage of the diversion. Crosby, who had arrived on the scene, was aiding him.

Troopers were in full possession of the road and the bridge. Even now, trucks were moving forward, bound for the creamery. And the temper of the crowd had changed. The surprise had worn off. But anger had been replaced by amusement.

Men who a few minutes before had glared at each other, exchanged bantering remarks, taunting each other because they had failed to stand up before the elephant. Smiling farmers kidded back and forth with grinning troopers.

Tiny David heard Crosby explaining to a laughing crowd:

"We have six more in the barracks. We keep 'em for emergencies like this."

Tiny David relaxed, and prepared to make himself as comfortable as possible for the remaining eight miles. He patted the wrinkled neck.

"Good old Napoleon!" he said. . . .

There was a large and enthusiastic audience as they turned in at the barracks. It included reporters and photographers, for the telephone had carried news of the exploit.

Mr. David, from his lofty perch, was very aloof and somewhat haughty.

They came abreast of the crowd.

"Whoa, Napoleon!"

Napoleon halted.

"Kneel, Napoleon!"

Napoleon went down on his knees.

"Trunk, Napoleon!"

Napoleon's trunk came around to assist him, and he dismounted slowly and with dignity. Then he stood there, peeling off the gloves he had donned for the last quarter mile, and adjusting an invisible monocle.

"Quite a gathering!" was his verdict. "Bless my soul." His glance included Captain Field, who was framed in a window. "Didn't know we had that many on relief."

They pressed about him, firing questions. He pretended bewilderment.

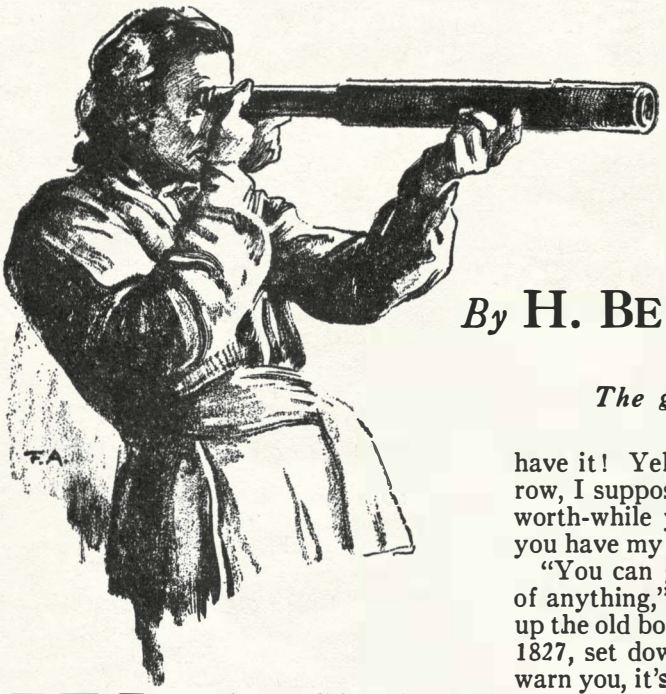
"Milk war? I know nothing of any milk war. Can't a gentleman and his mount take their daily canter without this vulgar curiosity and confusion?"

Then he spied Top-sergeant Payton.

"Check me in, Max. And my mount. And have the stable-sergeant break out triple rations."

A crooked grin played over his broad face. His hand lingered over the trunk that was thrust at him inquiringly.

"You sure earned that much, Napoleon!" he asserted.



The

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

The grim story of an old-time

WE had been talking of queer ships; rattan ships, concrete ships, and some one even mentioned the old Chinese Navy *guardo* built of red brick, that used to be moored off the Shanghai Bund.

"Queerest of all was the Yellow Ship," said the Professor; he had thick lenses, a shock of rope-yarn hair, and a positive way of speech. "That is, if you look at what's inside of a ship, not outside. There's a great yarn in her last voyage."

"Never heard of her," grunted Cap'n Fitzmaurice, the hydrographer.

"It's not a nice story, some ways," the Professor said, hesitating. He drew an old, tattered book from his pocket and thumbed it. "All dead true, but strong. A bit too strong, I expect."

Cap'n Dahl, the local steamboat inspector, who had commanded his own brig at twenty-one, let out a booming laugh.

"What d'ye think we are, Professor? Kids in school?"

The Professor frowned, screwing up his face and thumbing his bit of a book.

"Well, not that. It's the sort of thing people shrink from facing, nowadays; they like to say it never existed." He glanced at Cap'n Birchwood, the big Britisher. "I'm talking about convict ships, which had a definite place in sea history; but I don't want to offend anybody, and—"

"Yoicks! Don't mind me!" bawled out the husky Birchwood. "You Yanks still have your chain-gangs, not to mention sweat-boxes where you burn prisoners alive. Strong stuff, is it? Then let's have it! Yellow ship and the broad arrow, I suppose. Eh? If you can get any worth-while yarn out of a convict ship, you have my leave!"

"You can get a worth-while story out of anything," said the Professor, holding up the old book. "It's all here, printed in 1827, set down by James Conroy; but I warn you, it's—well, it's a thing to shy at, if you're afraid of the truth. It's none of your la-de-da yarns about nice people and perfumed ladies and polished gentlemen."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Cap'n Dahl fervently. "If it's the real stuff I'll cry amen! I'm mortal sick of the sort of tripe that uses cusswords just to make an impression, like some men I know."

The Professor smiled. "All right, you asked for it. It's real, too; all eye-witness stuff. We're dealing with criminals, remember. Felons. None of your hero-falsely-accused lemonade, but honest rum with a kick to it."

"One o' the best men I know," said Cap'n Fitzmaurice, "is in Sing Sing today, and deserves to be there. Heave ahead! Where do we start?"

"At Spithead, year not specified, but around 1800," the Professor rejoined. "The *Phœnix* sailed in convoy with four other convict ships. She was Moulmein built, of solid teak; like the others, she was painted a bright yellow and blazingly marked with the mark of Crown property, the broad arrow. Being the largest and best equipped of the whole felon fleet, she was designated as a women's ship; that is, given over to female prisoners alone. You'll have to understand conditions—"

HARD enough in all conscience—for felons were not human but mere beasts, so far as treatment went. Crowds of wretched females, all ages from twelve years to sixty, were jammed into the narrow cells, with no ventilation and only

Yellow Ship

and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

convict ship—the thirty-second story of the "Ships and Men" series.

occasional supervision by the convict guards. One may well shrink from the facts.

Captain Ronson, in command, was a gross hulk whose life had been spent in the meanest of all ships, the coasting colliers. His mate was one Ned Wolf; his second, a furtive gallows-bird named Spink. Captain Halter, officer of the hangdog soldiers who served as convict guards, had graduated from the prison docks at Portsmouth. No worse, or better, scoundrels could have been chosen by the contractors whose wolfish greed crowded the vessels to slave-ship capacity. The contractors received sixpence per day for each convict's food; the longer the voyage, the more they received from the Government. . . .

With all hands drunk or recovering from shore debauches the first few days out, little heed was paid the prisoners. Then Ronson sobered up, to find the ship bowling along on a fair wind and all well. He sent the cabin-boy for the mate, poured himself a round of grog with shaking fingers, and downed it.

Taking a long clay pipe from the rack, he filled and lit it, and eased himself into the big chair under the stern-window of the cabin. He was a coarse, bloated hulk, with a vile fury of temper when crossed, and at sea was a tyrant dreaded by men and officers alike. Hanging under the window, close to his hand, was a sling that carried two brass pistols. As he waited, he primed them afresh, then let them be and went on smoking. Another drop of rum, and he felt quite himself once more. He had been in a drunken stupor since yesterday.

Ned Wolf appeared, a lean, powerful man with boldly aggressive eye and truculent mien. The skipper surveyed him without love, and sneered at sight of a fresh bruise on the mate's upper cheek.

"So ye've been at the lasses already, Ned? And got something for your pains. Serves ye right for a scurvy rogue! Well, I suppose we got to sea without the smith and armorer we lacked?"

"We did not," said Ned Wolf without respect. "You signed him on yourself, with Blowsy Fanny on one knee and her holding the quill."

"Say ye so?" Ronson chuckled. "Is the fellow good?"

"Too blasted good," growled Wolf. "A damned impudent rascal who needs a flogging. His name's Connell. He knows his business, though."

"Then all's easy." The skipper laid aside his churchwarden. "Come! Out wi' the prisoner list, and God help you if you've laid a finger on one of 'em!"

GLOWERING, the surly mate produced a sheaf of papers. Ronson took them and scanned them quickly, and a contented chuckle shook him.

"Four hundred and thirty-one!" he exclaimed. "Happen there'll be a few pearls among hell's sweepings; there always are. Eh? Speak up, speak up!"

"Aye." The mate grinned faintly, but his eyes remained dark and evil and alert.

Ronson grunted and poured another drop of rum into his mug.

"Fetch 'em in for inspection. And mind this, ye blackguard! Any cheating, and I'll have ye triced up and given three dozen of the cat! That's a promise."

Wolf shot him one hard glance of bitter fury and disappeared.

Presently he was back, and Spink with him, and they ushered in six young girls, transported for offenses as monstrous as filching a comb from Madam's dressing-table or mayhap stealing a loaf to avoid earning it less honestly. Half-clad, bedraggled and dirty and seasick, all six were weeping bitterly.

Before any could speak, however, a new sound came through the quarterdeck passage, a sound of thin wild cries and screaming.

"Zounds!" A bellowing oath escaped Ronson, and his empty mug slammed down on the table. "Spink! Find Halter and get below—jump! Any man who touches a lass now gets a dozen of the cat. Below, ye rogue! See to it!"

Spink darted away. Ronson sat back, muttering about the impudence of the rascals. His eyes scanned the six girls, and settled on one of them.

"Ha! You by the door—what's your name?"

The one addressed, a pretty country chit of fourteen, could only stare at him, speechless, frightened, shivering.

"Speak up, speak up, lass!" said Ronson. "Passage aft, good bunks, good food, and naught to be afeared of, besides a chance of reaching Botany Bay alive and hearty, which is more than all those below can hope for. What's your name?"

The girl burst into violent sobs. Ronson came to his feet, but at this moment came quick, heavy steps in the passage, and the door swung open. From the mate broke one low and vicious oath of rage.

SPINK, now returned, was ushering in, with his crafty grin, a young woman and a tall, muscled figure of a man.

"This is one on the list but not below, Cap'n," he exclaimed. "And here's the smith and armorer likewise, who'll have a word with ye."

The skipper looked at the powerful features of the armorer, uncomprehending; then at the young woman.

No country girl, this, no sorry scum of the London streets, but a tall, darkly handsome lass who stood the deck like a seaman, and met his questing look with an eye of scorn. Well clad, brown of cheek, capable and alert, she was beautiful by any standard.

"Cap'n, this is Nell Bently of Devon," said Spink, a malicious glitter in his eye as he caught the furious look of Ned Wolf. "Took for a smuggler and transported. Cap'n Nell, she's called, having her own ketch and being a good seaman by all accounts. You'll find her on the list all shipshape, but I found her locked in the mate's cabin and fetched her along. All's quiet down below for the present, Cap'n."

The armorer, Connell, stood with arms folded across his chest, appraising the men and the scene before him. He had direct, unflinching eyes beneath straight black brows.

"So that's it, is it?" mouthed Cap'n Ronson, fastening a deadly stare on the mate. "Holding out on the cap'n again! What, Ned, you'd cheat the master as loves you?"

His voice was deadly as his eye. Wolf rolled out a curse.

"Nothing of the sort! I tell you—"

"And she gave you that bruise on the cheek, Ned?" went on the master.

"I tell you, you don't understand!" rasped Ned Wolf furiously. "Why, damme if I so much as knew she was aboard—"

"Belay," came a new voice. Connell had suddenly broken silence, his tones ringing and vibrant with angry scorn. "No lies, no lies! Everyone knows Cap'n Nell was convicted and sent to the *Phœnix*. And she paid the mate well to keep her out o' the cells and put her in peace."

"Aye, aye," spoke up the second officer craftily, a viciousness in his manner. He hated the mate bitterly. "It was her as give 'un the mark, Cap'n. He wanted her for hisself, but I fetched her aft. 'Twas me duty and no more."

Ronson, finally comprehending things, was glaring at the mate, a purplish flush stealing into his gross features. He gently tucked one hand behind him to the sling hanging on the wall.

"Remember what I promised you, Ned," said he. "You damned double-dealing rogue! Triced up to a grating at sunset, and three dozen of the cat criss-crossing your back, and a dose o' salt rubbed in for good measure. I'll learn ye to hold out on the ship's master— 'Ware, you fool! Hand away from that knife—"

"Damn you, 'ware yourself!" screamed Wolf shrilly, suddenly, and his hand flickered up and down. With that sudden scream, all hell was loosed.

THE skipper's hand leaped into sight, the brass pistol roared; the women shrieked wildly and powder-smoke rolled through the cabin. That heavy ball went true. With the blue mark of it between his eyes, the mate lay in a huddle. Ronson let fall the pistol and plucked at his fat throat with both hands. Ned Wolf's knife had likewise driven true. Ronson plucked it out with a rush of blood, fell back against the wall, and slid down out of sight behind the table. He groaned once, then was still forever.

The girls were clinging to one another as the smoke cleared. Spink had retreated to the door; he stood against it, with a small pistol in either hand, his crafty, high-boned features alert and excited. Nell Bently was standing now within the arm of Connell, who craned over for a

glance at the skipper, and then straightened up and met the gaze of the second mate. The women calmed down.

"Well," said Connell curtly, "you're in command."

"Done, is he? Good riddance," shrilled Spink. "And now what, Cap'n?"

"Eh?" Connell frowned, and the other laughed harshly.

"Oh, I twigged you the minute ye come aboard! Cap'n Connell, Cap'n Tom Connell o' the *Devon Maid!* The shrewdest, boldest smuggler 'twixt Tilbury and Penzance, shipping as armorer aboard a yellow ship—ha-ha! The reason's plain to see, in the bend of your arm."

Connell's eyes flashed cold and challenging. He abandoned all pretense.

"Aye, Cap'n Nell and I hang together," he said curtly. "Do you turn back and ship other officers, or do you play out the game yourself?"

The excitement deepened in the pinched, bony features.

"Aye, that's it!" Spink said quickly. "Cap'n, is it? Master of the ship, by God! A rare stroke of luck, and I'd be a fool to miss it. And yet—"

Connell's laugh rang out sardonically.

"It'd make your reputation! Aye, Master Spink! To navigate the ship to Botany Bay would be the makin's of you for life—if you knew how to do it! But your duty is to signal the convoy and take a master aboard."

"Damn the convoy!" cried Spink. "I get what you're driving at. You're a captain and a famous one—the greatest blackguard on all the south coast to boot, and a reward on your head. King's money for your capture. Ha! You risked a lot for the sake of a lass, you fool! Do we talk proper, or not?"

"Why not?" said Connell, relaxing. "Clear out these women and the two bodies, and then we'll talk—you and I and Cap'n Nell."

"Right," said Spink, and cocked an eye at the window. "Sunset coming, and the night ahead—right! Stay here, the both of you. We'll talk, over a bit o' supper."

So they did, and came finally to agreement on a basis of mutual understanding. Nell Bently said little, but used her eyes; she was used to dealing with men, and knew a bad one when she saw him.

Not that Spink seemed overtly a bad one. Connell read him for a cunning and cowardly rat—and was dead right. However, the man was affable, friendly, driven by a sudden ambition to seize destiny by the forelock; he demanded that Connell teach him navigation and other duties of a master, stand behind him and coach him, and when needful fight for him.

To all of which Connell readily agreed, being himself eager to seize the great chance offered him. He was to become first officer, and Cap'n Nell would perforce share his cabin, space being cramped aboard. The women were not to be molested, and those in irons were to be loosed, confirmed criminals or not.

Spink protested, but gave in.

"You're asking for trouble," he said. "It's custom for the men; full half the crowd are criminals or worse, anyhow. Well, have it your own way! There'll be ructions in the morning."

Connell bared his teeth, a way he had.

"Back me up with pistols, and I'll handle these scum alone. We'll give 'em no

time to think of women, after tomorrow! There's work enough to keep all hands slaving. And before we sight Botany Bay, you'll set me and Cap'n Nell ashore."

Spink promised readily. "What about taking a few more with you?" he said, laughing. "There's half a hundred would follow at your word, and you might set yourself up like a Grand Turk."

"I can't save 'em all from hell," said Connell, "though there's many of 'em might be worth the effort. Now, we're faster than the other ships. Stay you with them?"

"Damme if I will!" exclaimed Spink. "I'll crack on all sail tonight, and they'll be under the horizon with morning. Agreed, then! And here's my hand on it."

LATER, alone together, Connell took Cap'n Nell by the shoulders and met her brave steady eyes, gravely.

"Lass, from the day ye gave me your love, I've looked at no other woman, nor ever will. I shipped aboard here in hopes to save ye from hell; belike, it's done. And for me, a new life and a new name, somewhere in a new country. We'll share the future. Content?"

She laughed softly, richly. "My dear, I've been content from the day I first met you! But have a care. Don't take too much for granted. Spink is cunning, crafty, playing for his own hand. He'll stab you in the back if he gets a chance."

"You watch my back; I'll answer for the front," said Connell. "Besides, he's tied to us, now."

"He's not one to let the women alone," said she bluntly.

Connell nodded. "Like enough. None shall be forced, at least; there's plenty of them to consent willingly, and we'll let it go at that. But the young lasses sha'n't be molested. And there's Cap'n Halter to be reckoned with, too, with his sojers; but he's dead drunk now, and won't sober up till sometime tomorrow, so time enough to think of him."

Morning, he knew, would bring crisis, and he was ready to meet it with brutal efficiency. It was stay on top or go under, and he had no notion of going under. Luckily, Spink must stand or fall with him; he would have needed support here.

BY morning, indeed, the ship was in ferment, for the convoy was out of sight, and it was known that captain and mate were dead. Connell was privately picked out the best man in the crew, one Jem Hanaker, to act as second mate. A husky giant, approved by Spink, Hanaker moved aft and could be relied upon for backing. Also, Captain Halter remained in a drunken stupor, which was lucky, for there was trouble in the man.

The men trooped aft to the quarter-rail where Spink and his new officers stood, to the shrill of the bosun's pipe. They had arms, open or concealed; but they also had an innate, panicky fear of authority, as Connell well knew. Navy deserters, offscourings of waterfront jails, short-term felons, they were an evil lot, and they meant trouble.

Spink, with a ruffling swagger, pointed to the shrouded forms of Ronson and Ned Wolf, announced their decease, announced the new officers.

There was a surly growl, and one of the hands let out a shout.

"How about the wenches?"

"No," said Connell, at the ladder. "Not now nor later, you scum! That's all ended."

A yell went up, a surge forward; threats and imprecations and fury filled the air, and they went at the ladder.

Connell, with one leap, was down among them, sending two men sprawling. Then the heavy teak belaying-pin in his hand began to crack out mercilessly. For thirty seconds they fought him viciously, but his silent, grim ferocity overawed

them; he lashed, clubbed, kicked with all the power of his two hundred pounds.

Then Jem Hanaker joined in; and Spink, his brass pistols glinting in the sun, stood at the rail above. The throng broke, with wild cries. One man, drawing aside, whipped out a pistol, but Connell saw the weapon in time. His bloody belaying-pin shot through the air like a bullet, with perfect aim; the fellow dropped with his skull crushed in, and the fight was over.

"All hands! Line up, line up," commanded Connell. "Come along, Cap'n Spink. They want to turn over all weapons to you."

A shrewd move, he thought, to gratify Spink's new authority, but Spink was the shrewd man here. While the two mates stood off, he moved among the cowed and bloody crew, taking a weapon here and another there, but not all. Those knocked out and agroan on deck were disarmed. The dead man was ordered flung over, and the two former officers with him.

"There ye be," said Spink, with a spiteful disdain as he eyed the fifty-odd men. "Not a weapon left among the lot, as is proper. And any man who growls at orders from aft, gets a dozen lashes. I should give most of you rogues a touch of the cat now, but bein' a humane and kind-hearted master, I'll give the warning instead. And any man complained against by one o' the women below, gets three dozen on the spot. Mind that! Get to your quarters. Mr. Hanaker, keep your watch on the run, clean up these decks, get started on the brasses. You dogs will work from now on."

Cap'n Nell spoke with Connell later.

"Spink has friends amongst 'em," she said briefly. "Three or four he passed up, with a wink and a look, when he was searching."

Connell shrugged. "Let be, lass; the main thing is that we're on top, and Spink has need of us. Besides, we've got Halter to reckon with yet."

This reckoning came at noon, when Connell was making his observations on the poop. In his capacity of armorer, he had gone the rounds below, freeing the poor shackled women from their irons, and had heard that the guard captain was up and stirring. Now he saw Halter approaching in a fury, two pistols protruding from his belt.

A loose-lipped hulk of a man, all in disarray from his carouse, Halter was typical of the bullying, brutal convict guards. As he came, he hailed Connell in accents redolent of Bow Bells.

"I sye, you! What the bloody 'ell d'ye mean by tykin' the basils off my prisoners? I'll 'ave ye triced up for it!"

Connell set down his octant on the cabin scuttle and picked up the belaying-pin placed for ready use. He regarded Captain Halter with assumed surprise, and the other came close with beefy fist shaking.

"Speak up, ye dog!" he roared. "I'll 'ave the flesh off your back for this! Let my prisoners loose? S'elp me, I'll 'ave your bloody life—"

Silently, Connell smashed him fair between the eyes with the cruel teak, and Halter went to the deck. Before he had done quivering, Connell leaned over him and took away the pistols, then returned to his observation.

Presently Halter shambled and stumbled to his feet, gripped a backstay, and wiped away the blood. Connell turned:

"I took the irons off the prisoners because they're not needed. And you'll not need pistols to bully women prisoners. You have iron gratings over the hatches, and that's enough to keep the poor wretches in their pig-sty."

"I'll be the judge o' that," fumed the other. "Who the bloody 'ell are you?"

Connell laughed thinly. "I'm the man who'll have you triced up and given three dozen of the cat you talk so much about, if you lay hand on one of the women below. Now get back to your duties, ye rogue, and be thankful I don't have ye stripped and flung below amongst the prisoners."

Halter let out a bellow at the half-deck, where a number of his soldiers were lounging.

"Lay aft 'ere! Guards! Up 'ere and clap this blackguard in irons!"

The men snickered among themselves and remained deaf to his commands. He fell silent, wiped the blood from his eyes again, and fear took hold of him, as he met the gaze of Connell.

"Stay off this deck, officer or not, unless you're bid," the latter said coldly. "Now get for'ard among the other swine where you belong. Get!"

He took one step. Captain Halter turned and hastily decamped.

A HARD eye, a hard fist, and merciless punishment was what these men understood best; and they got it in plenty. The cat-o'-nine tails was bloody more than once thereafter; the men were hazed and slaved and driven like dogs, and Captain Spink made them like it.

Spink, somewhat to the surprise of Connell, pursued his ambition hard, drank not at all, worked long and steadily at navigation lessons, and took a crafty, gleeful pride in the rôle of ship's master, and in enforcing Connell's advice. Also, he remained affable and friendly, and it was settled that after rounding the Cape, Cap'n Nell and Connell should be set ashore at St. Mary's of Madagascar.

"But I distrust him," said Cap'n Nell, a glint in her dark eyes. "Mark my words, Tom, he'll cheat us yet!"

"If he does, I'll kill him; and he knows it," Connell said grimly. "I doubt if he'll risk it."

He forgot that Spink was learning, more fully with each day, the duties and the responsibility of a master, and was building a new and glorious future on the outcome of this voyage.

A MONTH ran on, two months, well into the third; the *Phœnix* was making good time and a speedy run. She was across the Line well ahead of schedule, with never another glimpse of her consorts. Other sail were sighted, but the yellow sides and the broad arrows blossoming on the canvas made her shunned like the plague.

At last they drew in at the old watering-place of the East Indiamen, Saldanha Bay, north of the bleak Cape. Here they found no other vessel, and remained for three days, all hands and prisoners taking trips ashore and stretching legs on land, or bartering with the fierce blacks who brought down wild cattle, and filling water-casks anew for the long voyage ahead.

"Why not leave her here?" demanded Cap'n Nell, as she and Connell walked ashore. "We may never get another chance. Here's our time, Tom!"

Connell laughed harshly, as he pointed to the black warriors and their spears.

"Aye, time to die quickly! I've heard tales o' this end of creation. To jump ship here, means sudden death amongst the blacks, or what's worse, slow death. Nowhere to go here; huge deserts, barren uplands, black savages who kill anyone—"

"Is that worse than prison and slavery?" she demanded.

"It is," said he. "For at worst, one has hope. Here there's none. At St. Mary's of Madagascar, we'll be among friendly, pleasant natives who like whites."

"And if we don't get put ashore there, Tom?"

"Why, then, make the best of it and fight on!" said he, smiling. For he did not share her distrust of Cap'n Spink—at least, did not share it sufficiently.

Off again, rewatered and refreshed, and around the Cape with a tall wind—not halting there, for the yellow ship got scant welcome. Connell was in high spirits, with only another day or two before freedom; but now fate closed in. . . .

"I'll not do it," said Cap'n Spink bluntly. His shifty eyes went from Connell to Cap'n Nell.

"You'll not set us ashore?" gasped Nell Bently. "But you promised!"

"Aye, and I'll do it later." Spink leaned forward. "Look'ee, Connell! I don't dare, and that's the truth, my davy on it! Think o' the thousands of miles ahead, and me alone! I need ye, man; I have need of your navigation."

"Yours is good now," snapped Connell.

"Not good enough." Spink wagged his head doubtfully. "Not for what's facing us. The chart puts fright into me."

"You damned coward!"

"Aye, like enough," admitted Spink. "Once acrost the Indian Ocean, there's time and places enough. I'll need you till then."

Connell assented, not with good grace, but helpless. And two mornings later he found the brace of brass pistols clean vanished from the cabin.

"I told you so!" exclaimed Cap'n Nell.

"Aye," said Connell, his oaths done. "You were right," he added bitterly. "And there's not a man of all aboard who'll lend me a hand. Not Hanaker; he's turned surly. The rest hate me."

"They don't hate me," said Cap'n Nell frowningly. "Put a good face on it, see it through; and where would ye land if all went well?"

"Melville Island," replied Connell. "What's in your mind?"

"A boat, and men to lower it," said she. "I can manage that, never fear. That is, if he still refuses then."

SO Connell put a good face on it, and spoke Cap'n Spink fair. All this while, Spink touched no liquor; he aimed to sail into Botany Bay as master.

"Not that anybody except Connell stands in the way," said Jem Hanaker darkly.

"I'll take no chances," snapped Spink. "A carouse, and I might well lose the ship, for he'd have to be killed first. Cap'n Halter's getting out of hand too; you bid him wait till the time's ripe."

Connell found, as the long days wore drearily, that he was being watched—

watched everywhere and in everything he did. Four of the crew proved ever more friendly with Spink, backed up his orders, served as his spies and men forward —the same four who had not been disarmed at the start. Bullies, they were, and proper bullies. They watched, and the soldiers watched, and Jem Hanaker watched. Cap'n Spink, affable and friendly, did no watching at all, but the crafty glint in his eyes got ever deeper.

And for lack of pistols, Connell had to temporize. Nor could he get any, as the ship sped down across the Indian Ocean; he was watched at all times, as Cap'n Nell was watched; and the men she thought to bribe could get her nothing. They did promise, however, about the boat—because they also wanted to skip the ship. So there was hope.

The misery of the sweltering holds brought many a death below. Then came the hurricane which swept and battered the ship for six days, with only the superb handling of Connell pulling her through at all. When the battened hatches were lifted at last, even the callous Captain Halter could not bear the sight below. They sent over fifty bodies of women to feed the sharks that day.

ON through the Arafura Sea, on to Melville Island, Cap'n Nell scheming well with the two men forward. Every detail was set and ready for the next night. But in the morning, topsails were sighted. Spink ran up a signal; for once, the other craft did not run from the yellow ship, but stood straight for them.

And upon Connell grew the awful realization. A sloop of war, the Union Jack, and the end of hope. She drew in close, luffed, and hailed. She would convoy them to Botany Bay. Haul away and remain in company!

He went down to his own cabin and found Cap'n Nell shaken with sobs. She turned to him fiercely.

"And now what's the end of it all? Botany Bay, and me a felon, and you with a price on your head, a wanted man, as Spink well knows! He'll turn you in. They'll laugh at the marriage he performed as captain, though it's legal enough."

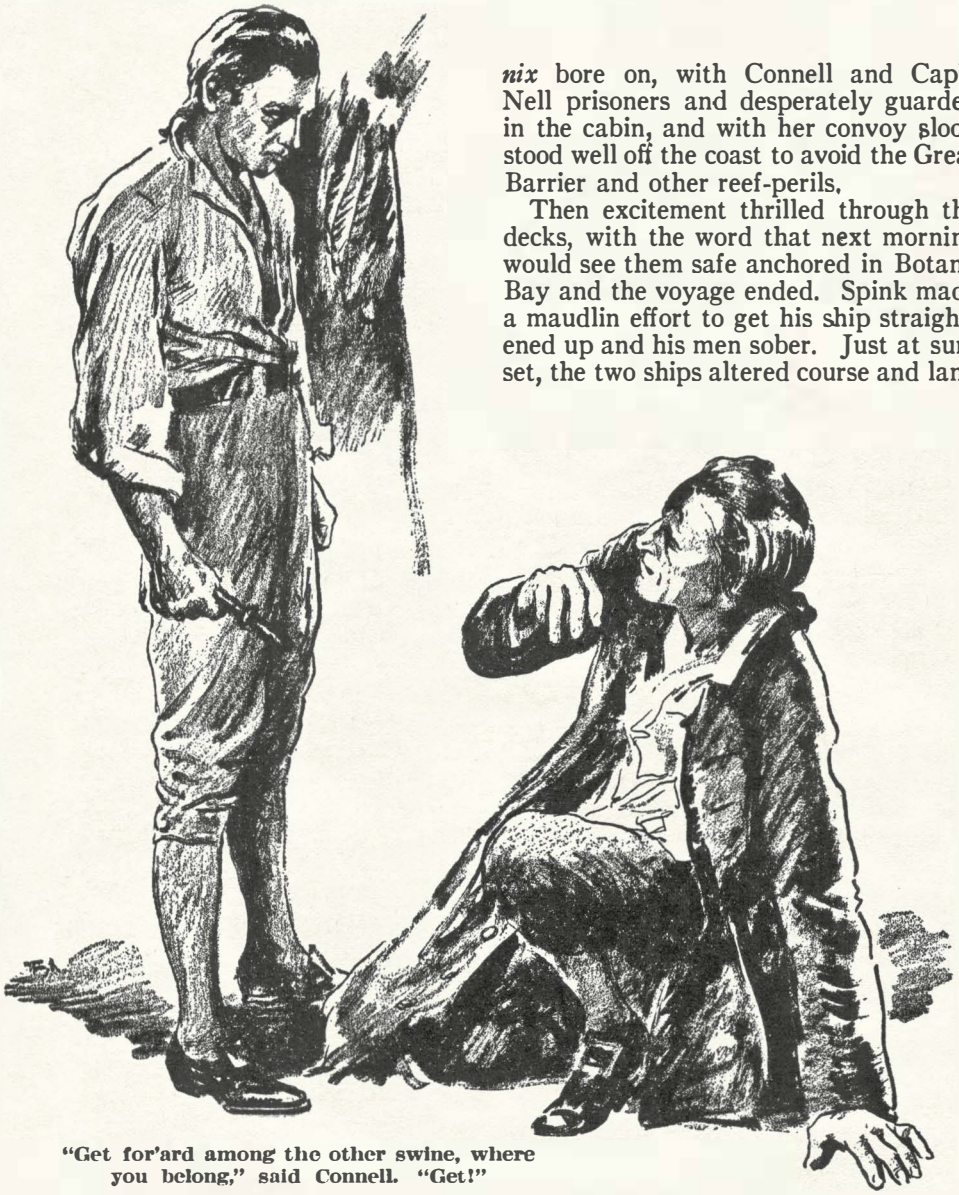
"Aye," said Spink, opening the door quietly and stepping in. Outside were two soldiers with muskets.

"Aye, like enough," Spink went on, as the two of them stared at him. He grinned faintly. "No more need of your navigation now, Connell, with a King's ship to guide and stand by us. And me being master, every female on the books will count. You go in as a felon, Nell, and your man gets turned in. The reward's fat."

A whiff of rum came from him. Connell started up, but Spink whipped out a pistol, one of the fine brass pistols that had vanished.

Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson

"I shipped aboard here in hopes to save ye from hell, lass. We'll share the future. Content?"



"Get for'ard among the other swine, where you belong," said Connell. "Get!"

"Stay you here, and break out if you want," said he, backing through the open doorway. "There's loaded guns and heavy butts, if you want to show fight; if not, stay you here, and the door's barred."

Barred it was, and full welcome. For all restraint was off now, rum was broken out, and with only a guard at Connell's cabin and a man to tend the helm and keep the ship within sight of the sloop of war, all hell was let loose on the yellow ship.

The days passed in a riot, as the two vessels crossed the Bay of Carpenteria and passed Cape York. Spink played his rôle of master with a brave swagger when sober, with crafty brutality when drunk. A true hell-ship now, the *Phœnix* bore on, with Connell and Cap'n Nell prisoners and desperately guarded in the cabin, and with her convoy sloop stood well off the coast to avoid the Great Barrier and other reef-perils.

Then excitement thrilled through the decks, with the word that next morning would see them safe anchored in Botany Bay and the voyage ended. Spink made a maudlin effort to get his ship straightened up and his men sober. Just at sunset, the two ships altered course and land was raised. Spink went aloft with the glass, and sighted the high bluish bluffs that marked the entrance to Botany Bay. He sent down a jubilant shout to announce the news—and with its accustomed lack of warning, the dread southeasterly "buster" of the South Austral waters leaped down from a clear sky.

THE hurricane-squall struck from dead astern. By the time Spink regained the deck, the topsails had been ripped from the bolt-ropes. The huge forecourser, which had been sharp-braced on the larboard tack, held the wind, and the ship lay almost on her beam ends.

The entire deck was plunged into chaos, with shrieking women fighting to get up from the holds, and men running

frantically to clap the hatches shut. Spink, in an access of terror, caught hold of Captain Halter.

"Get Connell! Get that damned Connell before we're sunk!"

Himself in a frenzy of fear, the guard captain went below on the run.

CONNELL came on deck to find men milling around the fife- and pin-rails in a tangle of buntlines, reef-tackles, down-hauls and other gear. He leaped among them, and the confusion subsided.

"All hands shorten sail! Larboard watch for'ard, sta'board at the main!"

The men took stations, frenziedly readying the gear, while Spink clutched a back stay on the poop. Obeying Connell's roar, the man at the wheel got the helm down, two more men came to aid him, and the ship headed away before the gale.

For the moment, safe; but whole water was slopping over the bulwarks, and the following seas rocketed spray over the high poop. Gaining power every moment, the buster harped through the rigging until its wild howls drowned the wailing shrieks from the battened cellholds below.

Connell swung on a weather stay and peered into the storm-wrack. Darkness had come full down; the land was completely blotted from sight; there was no mark, no light by which to con the ship to safety. He found Hanaker at his side, as the ship rolled high on a towering wave.

"Come along! All hands at it—must get that foresail reefed. Can ye do it?"

"Aye," responded Hanaker, and they clawed forward together, driving the men cruelly. Connell saw to the passing of the lazy tack and the casting adrift of the chain fore-tack, belayed to the capstan where it had been hove down before.

"Furl the weather and loose the lee!" lifted his roar through the speaking-trumpet Spink had shoved into his hand. "Stand by weather clew-garnet — man weather gear—"

Hanaker eased off the tack as the men took a strain, then let it fly; and with thundering claps the great canvas was snugged to the yard.

"Lee gear, stand by!" Up went the lee-side, and the thunder aloft subsided. Every man was working like a frenzied fiend now. "Up and reef it!"

Hanaker led the way. The men clambered up and laid out on the jolting yard. Reef cringles were picked up, reef-earrings passed; the reef-bands stretched along the iron jackstays; the reef-points were knotted—the job was done.

"Down with ye! Down and set it!"

The lee-sheet was dragged home, the tack bowsed down; the reduced sail took the wind, and with fiercely exultant relief, Connell found the ship steadying. Aft, now, to get the yards squared, and he loomed up before the men straining at the huge double wheel.

"Keep her before it!" he shouted. "If she jibes, you drown, you dogs!"

A wind-torn figure came to him in the obscurity, staggering through the spray and clutching at him. It was Cap'n Nell, and he drew her to the rail, placing her arms around the backstay.

"We'll weather it!" he shouted to her.

"What for? To rot in a prison ashore?" She put her face close to his, in the wet roaring darkness. "No, no! Why save the ship, Tom? Let her sink! Let's go with her!"

Connell held her close, and her words stabbed into his brain. A cold hand gripped at his heart. Save the yellow ship—why? For whom? Better die with the ship, as Nell said, than save it and be plunged into living hell ashore! Die with it, go down with one roaring whirlwind of death and destruction—aye, why not? Die, with Nell in his arms, die and end it all happily, fearlessly!

Hanaker came clawing along the rail.

"We aint far off'n the Heads!" he shouted. "We'd better wear, unless we want to pile up!"

A hoarse, wild laugh burst from Connell. Save a reeking hell-ship so she might carry more wretches to a living death? He stared into the swirling blackness, the instinct to live numbed in him.

A SUDDEN glare of lightning leaped white across the sky and was gone. Connell's trumpet lifted; he sent a roar down the deck, to the lookouts.

"Watch sharp for North Head! Next flash!"

Cap'n Nell cried again, despairingly: "Let her go, Tom! We'll go together—"

"Aye, but not to hell," he cried. Temptation was done. "I'll not have the blood of all hands on my head, and you in my arms before God! Let be, lass!"

Another crashing blare of fire across the sky. A terror-stricken shriek from the men forward.

"*Breakers!* Breakers ahead!"

Connell had glimpsed them for himself, the dull white loom of thunderous

waters beating on a lee shore. His trumpet came up. If that were South Head—

"At the helm! Larboard! Hard larboard!" He turned. "Hanaker! Larboard the fore braces!"

Hanaker's voice responded. Men were buffeted about the decks, but the yards jolted forward. The ship reeled.

"Keep her hard down!" shouted Connell. "Sta'board main braces—let 'em run!"

Moments, endless moments, dragging at eternity. Then, as Connell's arm held Cap'n Nell close, lightning crackled and crashed anew; a gasp broke from him. A maelstrom of tossing, foaming waters, dashing against towering cliffs close at hand. No salvation now; nothing would avail, nothing!

She struck; and so passed the *Phœnix,* within sight of the bay called Botany.

THE voice of the Professor ceased. His story was ended. As though in emphatic confirmation came the voice of a tug with a freighter in tow, whistling across the harbor for the drawbridge.

"Well," said somebody, with a sigh, "I suppose it's the proper ending for a yarn of that kind—all hands perished."

The Professor smiled, and thumbed his old book lovingly.

"In that case," he said, "who wrote this eyewitness account—some twenty years later—of what happened aboard the *Phœnix?"*

"Fiddlesticks and fisheyes!" snorted Cap'n Dahl. "No living thing could've got ashore. I've been in Sydney many a time. I've seen the bones of good ships on North Head, where the worst man-eating sharks in the world—"

"Belay!" roared out Cap'n Birchwood suddenly. "Ever hear o' the *Duncan Dunbar?* She was wrecked off North Head, and able seaman Johnstone survived. A matter of record, me lad!"

"Now, hold on, hold on," intervened the Professor gently. "I didn't say the story was ended. I didn't say a man wrote this book. As a matter of fact, a woman wrote it—a woman who lived in old Hobart Town, with a raft of kids fathered by a sealing-skipper whose rightful name might have been Connell instead of Conroy. Satisfied, gentlemen?"

The question was needless.

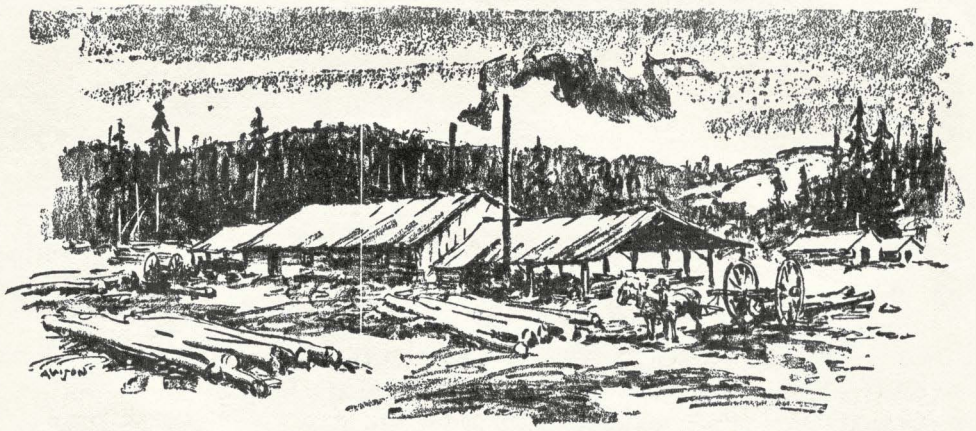
Another stirring tale of this series will appear in our September issue.

Your Magazine Grows

A SUCCESSFUL MAGAZINE, like a successful man, must continue to grow—and must, moreover, while remaining true to itself and its ideals, follow the trend of the times. Blue Book, in the thirty-four years of its life, has therefore occasionally altered its plan to conform with what seemed a change in its readers' interests. And your continued loyalty has been a reward for which we are deeply grateful.

Of late there has been manifest an increasing appreciation of longer stories which we have tried to meet by offering short complete novels, like "Riders for a Lost Cause," in this issue. But we have come to feel, frankly, that this is not good enough.

Beginning with the next issue, therefore, we are enlarging the magazine by one-third—increasing it from 144 to 192 pages, and shall offer you, among other worth-while things, *a complete book-length novel of 50,000 words.* To do this, it is of course necessary to raise the price—from fifteen to twenty-five cents a copy. But when you consider that we shall give you not only a rich assortment of short stories by the best writers of vigorous and virile fiction, *but a complete novel that if published in book form later would probably cost you as much as $2.00,* we are sure you will agree that you are getting a real bargain. Don't fail to read "Murder in the Sahara," by Galbraith Welch, who wrote "Unveiling of Timbuctoo," a book-length novel of fifty thousand words which, along with many other fine stories, will appear *complete,* in the next (the September) issue. We'd be glad to have you write us your opinion of this change. This is *your* magazine—and it's our job to please you.



Hard to Handle

Lumbermen play rough, sometimes—as witness this lively story.

By JOHN MERSEREAU

EVEN before Sam Powers reached the door of J. K. Meacham's private office, he foresaw that he was due for a thorough bawling-out. At best one was never summoned "into consultation" with the president and sole owner of the Long Bend Lumber Company unless there was a big blast waiting. Instinctively Sam hunched a pair of broad young shoulders, a gesture acquired from two years as full-back on an unselfish State team that had let him stop every play directed at their tissue-paper line. But J. K. Meacham was a rooting, tooting one-man team himself, a kicker from way back, with self-lubricating jaws. And now, as Sam Powers crossed the threshold of the private office, one glance told him that old J. K. was in the pink and r'aring to let go.

The owner of the Long Bend Lumber Company sat there behind his massive desk, looking directly toward the door. And despite his great gaunt frame and thatch of snow-white hair, old J. K. never could have been mistaken for a saintly patriarch. His eyes flamed with fury.

"Well?" he rasped.

"You sent for me, sir?" asked Sam.

"You know I sent for you. Sit down!"

Involuntarily, Sam obeyed. But he leaned forward sharply in his chair.

"Mr. Meacham—" he began.

"Powers," old J. K. cut in, "you've been purchasing-agent for this company for several months. I promoted you in one jump from a timekeeper's job in the woods."

"Yes sir; but—"

"You order all supplies for our logging-camp as well as for our Long Bend mill. So you're intimately acquainted with conditions up there, of course?"

"Of course," echoed Sam.

"And you know that this season's cut, the last of our Long Bend stumpage, is already contracted for; so the present rise in lumber prices can't help us until next year. Moreover, I've told you frankly that it's going to cost a fortune to open my holdings farther up the coast, and that we can finance the move only by squeezing every penny we spend meanwhile."

"Certainly." As purchasing-agent, Sam knew plenty about this heroic squeezing process. He had worked day and night to cut company expenses to the bone.

But that, he saw, wasn't going to help him in this emergency. Meacham's fist crashed upon a rumpled invoice sheet outspread before him.

"Then why," he roared, "why in Tophet did you put through this damn-fool order? Why? One hundred brand-new hickory peavey-handles, for a high-line redwood logging-camp!"

Despite himself, Sam Powers winced. Somehow the answer didn't seem as convincing as when he'd worked it out.

"One hundred peavey-handles," old J. K. resumed, "would be a whopping order for an Eastern pine or hardwood camp. And our redwoods run up to twelve and fifteen feet thick at the butts! Steel cables often give out, moving such giant stuff. And—Judas Priest!—you couldn't hook a peavey around many of the mere limbs we throw away as trash!

"Furthermore, you've charged 'em to insurance. Why?" Meacham demanded.

IT was up to Sam. He could abjectly admit a blunder and save his job. Or he could argue this thing out, and very likely get the boot. But Sam plunged recklessly to the defense of his tactics.

"It is insurance," he asserted, "insurance that's dirt cheap at the price. Sixty dollars to protect a tremendous order!" He was gaining speed and power after a bad start.

"Last fall," he resumed, "when Seaboard Superpower decided to go ahead with their big project on the north fork of Long Bend River, they contracted with us for mill delivery of our entire season's lumber cut. It was a fine deal for them, for their trucks have a short, cheap haul direct from our mill at Long Bend City. And it was a real break for us to have the chance to cash in quickly on the last of our Long Bend stumpage without a loss.

"But now,"—Sam shrugged,—"Superpower has tumbled to the inside facts: They've learned that our deep-water channel has silted up so badly that coastwise lumber schooners no longer can come in to load up at our wharf. They know we couldn't afford to dredge the channel for only this one year's use, and that we'd lose our shirts trying to bring lumber down here to 'Frisco in motor-trucks. So, in effect, they've become our only possible customer! They can name their own price for our lumber, if they can find a loophole in that contract!"

"Perhaps," admitted Meacham. "But it so happens that this contract is loophole-proof." He chuckled grimly. "I know, because it's worded exactly like one Seaboard held *me* to—back in '17. They're nailed to the mast, young man!"

"Provided," Sam amended, "we can saw out that order by the appointed date. If we can't, you'll be up Salt Creek."

"But such an emergency can't occur," said Meacham. "It's—why, damn it, it's preposterous! We've completed our log-cut. Our dams are filling, nearly ready for the drive."

"But supposing," Sam interposed, "supposing some one should blow open our dams tonight? Wide open! What then?"

He fell silent for a moment, and so did old Meacham, as they pictured the sweeping financial ruin that such a crime would cause. For the three "booster" dams up Long Bend River were the very heart of Meacham's lumbering operations. Even at high-water, the river had to be surcharged by these quick-opening dams to gain—for hours only—sufficient volume for a successful drive. In that brief time, enough logs had to go downstream to run the mill an entire year. And if the dams were destroyed at this late spring date, a drive definitely could not take place.

"Superpower *is* our only possible customer," Meacham granted. "But that also means that I'm the only possible source of lumber for them. We've got 'em across a barrel!"

"Not at all!" Sam contradicted. "If lack of lumber holds up Seaboard's North Branch development for a year, they'll simply speed up some other project, without a dollar's loss. Whereas, if our dams are blown, you'll have your entire working capital—and more—tied up in stranded logs. Your creditors, holding your seasonal notes, won't let you play a waiting game. They'll stampede unless you can prove they're safe. To stave off bankruptcy, you'll have to go to Superpower, and grin and like it, when they offer a new contract to buy our lumber—for a song!"

The prospect was not exactly pleasing, and old J. K. turned a trifle green around the gills as he considered it. But he rallied quickly.

"You're just trying to raise a smoke-screen," he charged, "to cover up those peavey-handles. But you're not going to get away with it! I insist on knowing why—"

The telephone jangled at his elbow. He snatched up the receiver impatiently.

"Yes?"

He listened briefly, then leaned forward intently.

"Judas Priest!" he snapped. "I can tell Sam Powers as well as you can, Stacker. Spit it out!"

ALREADY jittery, Powers sprang to his feet as J. K. named the man telephoning the office. For Sam knew thereby that this must be a long-distance call across more than three hundred miles of

wire. A call from "Stacker" Fallon, woods-boss up Long Bend River. And it would take a blue snow, at the very least, before Fallon would deign to report thus to headquarters!

And old J. K. was listening with undivided attention now, his fingers beating a nervous tattoo upon the desk.

"Of course," he said finally. "On the jump!"

He crashed down the receiver.

"We were right," he rasped. "And Stacker wants you—us, that is—to get up there in a hurry. He's just found a dynamite hook-up at Drum Creek Dam.

"Furthermore," old J. K. went on grimly, "all hell is brewing down on tidewater at Long Bend City. Seaboard fired its whole construction crew today—almost four hundred men—without notice. And we're the goat. The story's out that we are way late with deliveries on flume stock—a damn' lie!—and those construction roughs are threatening to go up the river and clean out our camp!"

"You see," Sam intruded, "what it's leading up to, don't you, sir? The men were fired today, and inflamed against us—for an alibi. But the dynamite was already planted at the dam!"

MEACHAM shook himself like a shaggy Airedale. From a near-by chair he snatched up a rumpled topcoat and an ancient hat.

"I don't believe it for a second," he denied virtuously. "The Seaboard executives are all fine, upstanding men. But," he exploded, "if the underhanded so-and-so's think they can blast me out of business, they've got another big guess coming. . . . Let's go!"

Pursued by Sam, he sprinted stiff-kneed for the elevator. One glare subdued the operator. They shot down to the ground floor without an intervening stop. They crossed the rain-swept sidewalk to a smart roadster parked beside a fire-plug. A cop, with one foot on the running-board, was even then filling out a traffic-violation tag.

None too gently old J. K. elbowed the officer aside, pushed Sam into the driver's seat and tumbled in beside him.

"Say!" began the cop. But his wrath died as he saw Meacham's drawn old face. "Sick, hey?" he sympathized.

"Acute lumber pneumonia—and probable sclerosis of the river," groaned old J. K. "Step on it, Sam!"

Sam did. The roadster slithered around a corner, roared through a tunnel, and stole a traffic light as it raced through Little Italy. It skidded onto the ferry a split-second before the closing-gate was dropped.

They ate a hasty supper on the upper deck, while off to port the blackness of a storm-swept night closed down upon the Golden Gate.

Then they were on the highway again, drumming northward through the pelting rain. The slick concrete unreeled before them, mile after blurred, deep-shadowed mile. Old J. K. peered at the speedometer once, then huddled back into the seat.

"About those peavey-handles—" Sam spoke up, finally.

"I'll get back to them," promised Meacham. "But right now, you watch your knitting while I figure out this mess."

His voice was peppery, as always. But Sam detected the querulous undertone that had crept into it. For it would be expecting too much even to hope that a county sheriff could expose the hidden hands preparing to ruin Meacham; and in this emergency, the law could not possibly protect both the tidewater mill and the upriver camp against attack. And what chance would even a loyal crew of lumberjacks have against four times their number of inflamed construction-stiffs?

"We'll see Halvord first," said Meacham. "He'll understand we have him over a barrel about that dynamite. With that pinned on him, he'll have to call off his men."

Sam shook his head dubiously. Halvord, Seaboard's executive engineer for the Little River construction area, was reputed to be the original wise old coot.

"Halvord," said Sam, "will point out that Seaboard isn't responsible for the acts of discharged workmen. And he'll just laugh if you accuse him of any knowledge of that dynamite."

HE lapsed into silence. Meacham did not respond. Presently Sam slowed down and made a sharp left-hand turn. Leaving the main highway, they headed west.

This branch road, however, was no speedway of concrete. It was a tortuous track of thinly graveled gumbo clay—twenty racking miles of it, mucking across cutover lands soaked through and draining like an oversaturated sponge.

Without chains, the roadster took a beating. And so did Sam. And he took

Illustrated by George Avison

Sam stumbled forward. It seemed his fist lifted in slow motion; but somehow it landed.

chances. He knew the route intimately after a winter of shuttling back and forth between San Francisco and the redwood Coast. But even so, it was sometime after midnight when he cut down the last steep grade.

There, booming in the darkness, was the ocean shore. There, straggling along a lagoon once channeled to admit small lumber freighters, gleamed the few rain-blurred street-lights of Long Bend City. And there, at this far edge of town, was Seaboard's corporation yard—illumined unnaturally, like a landing-field.

"Look!" Sam urged, as they neared the Seaboard property.

Old J. K. looked; first indifferently, then with a sudden, incredulous horror in his eyes. In the corporation yard a dozen trucks had been drawn up in a circle, their lights all focused on one central point. And within the ring thus formed, a mob of several hundred men milled about a big slab fire—over which dangled a figure wrapped in flames.

"Good God!" cried Meacham. "It's a man."

"No," contradicted Sam, "it's an effigy. Of *you!*"

He drove on another fifty yards, then brought the car to a silent stop. Here a comfortable bungalow shut off all view of the flaming pyre. Behind tight-drawn shades, light edged the window-panes.

"Halvord's still up. But perhaps," Sam added hopefully, "you've changed your mind about talking to him now."

"I don't change my mind. Get him out here, please."

Shrugging, Sam shut off the lights and motor and clambered stiffly from the car. The rain beat down on him. Mud sucked at his shoes as he deliberately left the shrub-bordered walk leading to a narrow porch. None the less, he circled past a front corner of the bungalow and had a look at the fire blazing in the corporation yard.

A glance told him that the passing roadster had aroused no interest there. Satisfied, he turned about—and stopped.

For the bungalow's front door had opened. In the aperture stood Halvord, a cadaverous little man with dead eyes and thin lips that spat words like the hissing of a snake. On the porch facing him stood a departing guest—a hulking figure, grinning as he buttoned the collar of a mackinaw stagged shirt about his bull-like neck. This was "Shag" Shamlin, a drunken, quarrelsome saw-filer recently discharged from Long Bend's camp.

BOTH the roadster and Powers were hidden by the darkness from these two. But at Sam's first almost noiseless footstep, Halvord broke off his low-voiced speech with Shamlin, and peered out into the night.

"Who the hell is that?" he challenged.

"I'm Powers," Sam said coolly, stepping up onto the porch, "Long Bend Lumber's most promising young execu-

tive, even though you meet me tonight as the president's chauffeur."

"Meacham with you, is he?" Halvord queried sharply.

"In the car yonder," gestured Sam. "We're taking a census of saw-filers who've made good with construction outfits—after dark!"

Shamlin advanced a step, glowering shoulders hunched.

"Listen, dog-face—"

"*Mr.* Dog-face, to you!" Sam grinned.

Crouching, Shamlin advanced another step. Sam cocked his right fist and held his ground. But Halvord's voice intruded peremptorily.

"Shag! Get back to that fire. In a hurry. See that none of those men wander off this way. In their present mood it wouldn't do for them to find Meacham here. Understand?"

Shamlin hesitated. Then his mouth sagged open in a sudden leer. Turning his back on Sam, he clattered down the steps and vanished around the corner of the house.

"WHAT," demanded Halvord, "does Meacham want of me?"

"He'll tell you that himself. But in a general way," confided Powers, "I think he's annoyed because you've been scheming to dynamite our dams!"

"It's preposterous!" retorted Halvord. "Shamlin and I are risking our very lives staying here, trying to keep these men in check. Even after they'd commandeered our trucks tonight, I refused the sheriff's help. I insisted that the law's full force be used to guard your mill from harm." He spread his hands. "So such a suspicion is both unjust and absurd."

"Ridiculous," agreed Sam, "but true!"

Wrathfully, Halvord started down the steps.

"I'll talk to Meacham. And by God, I'll sue the old buzzard for libel if he even hints at such a thing to me!"

But Sam did not wait to act as escort to the engineer. Abruptly he recognized the sound of running steps—many of them—pounding toward the bungalow. Halvord scuttled back onto the porch. Shag Shamlin, fleeter than the construction-stiffs streaming after him, plunged around the corner of the house.

Sam turned loose one jolting fist as Shamlin's hands clutched out for him. But he did not bore in after his staggered adversary. Rather, he turned and sprinted down the walk!

Without a wasted motion he eeled in behind the roadster's steering-wheel. He ground the starter-button beneath a muddy shoe. A rock crashed against the laminated windshield glass as the car lurched into motion. A heavy form leaped to the running-board. Meacham's bony fist flailed out. The form vanished. Sam shifted into second gear.

"The field was muddy," chuckled Sam, as the roadster splashed along; "but Powers, ignoring the frightful odds, as usual, ran like—er—like a frightened hare!"

"Did you see Halvord?" grunted old J. K.

"I left," reported Sam, "just after Mr. Halvord called you an old buzzard and threatened you with a libel-suit."

"Drive to the mill!"

Sam shook his head. Already he could hear the drumming roar of truck motors back there in the corporation yard. He spun the wheel and skidded into the narrow upriver road.

"No," he said. "The mill's insured, and the sheriff's there. At worst, we can throw together new sawing equipment in a few weeks. But we can't manufacture lumber without logs!"

He drove on in grim silence, shifting and re-shifting gears and wrestling with the wheel. On his left, lost in the darkness far below, swirled the Long Bend River. Nearing its peak level, unquestionably. In hours only, the drive would have to start—if it was to start at all.

SAM did not once look behind him during the racking miles that followed. But now and then, as the rain slackened momentarily, a reflected light glinted across the rear-view mirror. The trucks were following, right enough. More slowly, to be sure, but there were twelve of them. And each truck was loaded with thirty or more lawless dirt-camp roughs. . . .

It was passing two o'clock when Powers abruptly marked a torch-flare close ahead. He threw on his brakes and slithered to a stop against a steel-cable barrier stretched across the road. As he climbed from the car, half a dozen husky lumberjacks appeared from nowhere, headed by a grinning, rock-jawed giant.

"Jeez, Sam," boomed Stacker Fallon, with obvious relief, "I'm sure glad you pulled in—"

"Those peavey-handles got here, did they?" Sam intruded.

"Yesterday."

"Get that damned cable down!" wailed Meacham.

"Can't," Fallon advised him cheerfully. "I spliced it there in case Halvord sends his outfit up in trucks."

"They're on the way," Sam told him grimly. "Twelve of them, loaded to the guards."

He turned to the roadster. But Meacham had already clambered gingerly to the ground. They ducked under the cable and plodded on to the group of rough-lumber buildings that made up a typical West Coast logging-camp.

In the large clearing before the commissary,—lighted by several powerful gasoline pressure lanterns,—nearly a hundred loggers were gathered in scattered groups. Oblivious to the beating rain, they joked and gossiped; and many of them called out boisterous greetings to Sam Powers as they passed.

Yet there was an air of tense expectation and of inflexible, ready loyalty evident beneath this casual veneer. Loyalty to Sam, who was woods superintendent in fact—if not in salary and title—and who was one Forestry College man who didn't claim to know it all. And loyalty to Meacham, who could howl for days about a wasted dime, but always paid top wages and demanded good living-conditions in his camps.

"The river'll be up before daylight," Fallon reported as he preceded Sam and Meacham into the shelf-lined commissary. "And I've sent word to the damtenders to turn loose the boosters at four A. M."

"Okay," approved Sam curtly. "We've got hell *and* high water ganging on us, Stacker, but we'll move those logs!"

He pushed his way into Fallon's tiny bedroom, reappearing shortly wearing his own woods outfit: stagged shirt, calked logger's boots, and a pair of old "tin" pants.

He found Fallon standing in the outer doorway and passing out peavey-handles from an open crate, while Meacham watched with dawning comprehension in his weary, harassed eyes.

WITH a thin smile, Sam accepted one of the formidable weapons. And at that same moment a lumberjack came running across the clearing.

"They're here!" shouted the newcomer; and a rending crash down there by the cable barrier verified his words.

"My car!" groaned old J. K. "They've rammed it."

Sam faced him sharply, grasped his arm.

"You stay here, understand," he ordered peremptorily.

The rumble of truck motors and the squeal of brakes sounded clearly now down there by the barrier. Men began to filter through the scrub growth at the far edge of the clearing. They assembled there in constantly increasing numbers, shouting threats and curses, brandishing cudgels and blackjacks.

THERE were hundreds of them now fanning out in an undulating, uneven line; rough-and-tumble roustabouts who fought according to no code. And under the lash of stump whisky and glib accusations, they had been whipped to an insane, unthinking fury. Their only wish was to get to grips with the loggers bunched—silent now—beside the commissary steps.

Shag Shamlin held them back momentarily, running up and down the line, trying desperately to stay their advance until every truck was at the barrier. But the line broke past him in a surging wave; and with an inarticulate roar of hate, the construction-stiffs swept forward in a mass attack.

With a peavey-handle clenched in each great hand, Stacker Fallon sprang from the steps.

"Go get 'em!" he cried. "And damn the punk that lets a bindle-bum lay him out!"

In a compact group, with Sam Powers and Fallon in the lead, the Long Bend loggers pushed forward to meet Shamlin's men. Midway in the clearing the two forces crashed together. The attacking line, four deep at least, buckled at the center. The long flanks swung in, like the enveloping arms of an octopus. Hemmed in on every side, outnumbered five to one, Meacham's lumberjacks started logging for their lives!

Stacker Fallon's two arms swept back and forth in great mowing sweeps, like a reaper slashing down ripe grain. For a brief interval, swinging desperately, Sam kept pace with the giant woods-boss. Then they were swept apart. Swirled into the vortex of a whirlpool of heaving, struggling bodies, for a moment Sam barely held his feet. But somehow he braced himself, managed to dodge a whistling cudgel. His own weapon landed solidly. His man went down.

Then for a brief moment, as if he were within the inert center of a hurricane,

Powers found himself freed from the pressure of attack. His glance searched out across the bulging, tossing mass surrounding him. And almost at once he located the one he sought—Shag Shamlin.

For the saw-filer had not entered the conflict he had helped to bring about. On the contrary, he was already skulking along the border of the clearing toward the trail leading to the Drum Creek dam!

Taken alone, that did not interest Powers in the least. Guards were stationed up there now, of course. But another discovery did stir him deeply, to his considerable surprise.

From the elevation of the commissary doorway, Meacham evidently had spotted Shamlin's withdrawal, and had viewed it with needless but real alarm. At any rate, old J. K. plainly had set out to overtake and challenge Halvord's ugly aide; and the gap between them was narrowing with each step.

Sam did not hesitate. He tossed away the peavey-handle that could only impede him now. And crouching, he launched himself through the encircling press of bodies. Hands tore at him, but he hit too hard and fast to be any target for a club. His broad shoulders, driven by a fullback's legs, jolted all obstacles aside. He straight-armed one last enemy. Then he was in the clear, unchecked, bearing down on Shamlin, who had just discovered Meacham angling toward him from another point.

SHAMLIN, hearing the thudding footsteps, spun around. His arm lifted, fingers closing on the blackjack dangling from his wrist. He swung the lead-loaded weapon with terrific force—as Sam dived in a flying tackle at Shamlin's knees.

They battered together, fell. Missing its target, the billy whirled from Shamlin's grasp. But as he struck the ground, the big saw-filer twisted to one side. His knees lifted viciously and broke Powers' hold. The two of them scrambled to their feet and surged in with swinging fists.

Sam's knuckles mashed into Shamlin's heavy lips. In return he was rocked by a triphammer body blow. A straight left saved him as the bigger man followed in; but Shamlin's looping right laid open his eyebrow before he could pull away.

Blood, half-blinding him, rolled down his cheek. Bellowing triumphantly, Shamlin tried to repeat the lucky blow. But Powers slipped inside, lifting a deadly hook that just grazed his opponent's jaw.

"You've smashed my foot!" Halvord cried.

The saw-filer guffawed. He was big and tough and fast; he did not lack courage of a sort. And now, with weight and reach both favoring him, he was in his element.

He came boring in. He clubbed at Powers alternately with lefts and rights. Wide open, he was, but the very power of his attack was an excellent defense. Sam had done some boxing; but he now found his skill of small avail. For when he countered, Shamlin's fists—padded by no gloves—sledged in paralyzing blows to his guard arm.

Sam took enough of these to learn their numbing force. Then he threw caution to the winds. Feet braced, leaning forward, he slugged it out with Shamlin!

From there on, time stood still for him, a red haze of panting, endless effort. One side of his face was a crimson smear. The taste of blood was in his mouth. His bruised arms became dead weights. Only his jolting shoulders told him that he was still trading blow for blow.

But the old leg-drive was there. Shamlin, leering at him with tattered lips, could not force him back. And Shamlin couldn't seem to hurt him any more, even though at last, suddenly, he buckled to his knees.

But the saw-filer stood there swaying queerly then, arms dangling at his sides, without attempting to finish him. And dimly Sam heard Meacham's yell:

"Stay with him! The so-and-so's all in! Finish him, Powers!"

Sam stumbled up and forward. It seemed to him that his right fist lifted in slow motion toward Shamlin's jaw. But somehow it landed, despite the other's pawing body blow. And again the saw-filer's arms dropped to his sides.

"He's skybound!" screeched old J. K. "Chop him down!"

But Powers didn't have to strike again. Shag Shamlin teetered on his heels, eyes fluttering, then plunged forward to the ground. Out cold!

For a long moment Sam stood there, dully knuckling the burning sweat rime from his one good eye. Indifferently he was aware that the din of conflict in the clearing had died completely out. He heard cold motors spitting and backfiring as they came unwillingly to life.

Then, abruptly, his ears picked up the surging roar of Long Bend River. And no stimulant could have cleared his fuzzy senses as quickly as that sound. For it told him that four o'clock had come and gone. The boosters were being opened up!

He turned and saw men running across the clearing toward him, led by the giant woods-boss. Fallon's shirt hung in ruined tatters. There was a bloody welt across his scalp. But he ignored his own injuries as well as Sam's while his admiring glance rested on Shamlin's stiff, unconscious form.

"BOY, that's loggin'!" he applauded. "And we've been swamping out a few ourselves. You should've seen Halvord's face when his gang went breaking past him for the trucks!"

"Halvord?" echoed Powers.

"He just pulled in," grinned Stacker, "making a big play out of driving up the sheriff and the company doc."

"Get those logs moving, Stacker!" Sam sent off the jubilant woods-boss and his crew. "I'll be with you right away."

"Wait!" Meacham rasped at him. "I want you here when the sheriff takes this thug into custody and makes him talk."

"No one," Sam asserted with conviction, "will be able to *make* Shamlin talk—"

At the mention of his name, Shamlin stirred slightly. A gagging cough burst from his throat. Sam knelt down stiffly, resting one hand for support on the saw-filer's chest as he loosened the twisted collar of the other's shirt.

Only partly conscious though he was, Shamlin reacted to that pressing weight. His outspread fingers reached protectively for the pocket just above Powers' hand.

"Leave that alone!" he muttered thickly. "If Halvord wants it, he's gotta pay for it—through the nose."

SAM ignored the befuddled protest. He put aside the other's hand. Beneath his fingers he felt the crinkling of dry paper in the waterproof pocket. He removed the folded sheet, opened it, and lighted a match to scan the brief, penned note.

"I'll be back," he said laconically, and set off in the direction of the cable barrier. But presently he saw the man he sought emerge from the scrub growth at the far end of the clearing. He stopped and waited until Halvord came up to him.

"A regrettable situation," Halvord protested, while his cold, malicious eyes met Sam's glance in a probing stare. "Most regrettable. I was dumfounded when Shamlin let me down. However, the doctor says there are no really serious casualties."

"I'm afraid," intruded Sam, with brittle emphasis, "that you haven't been quite fair to Shamlin. You see, Halvord, I happen to have evidence—in your own handwriting—that you instructed your camp foreman to leave the key to the dynamite dugout where it wouldn't be too hard to find. You also ordered that your message be destroyed as soon as Shamlin delivered it, but it appears that he managed to hang onto it for purposes of his own."

"Surprising," Halvord said. His voice did not waver from its ordinary chilly monotone. "And important, naturally, if your statement is susceptible of proof."

Sam reached for his pocket, then shook his head. After a brief lull, the rain was beating down again. He led the way into the deserted commissary. At his heels, Halvord closed the outer door. They confronted each other in the big room, their wet faces yellowed by the lamplight, their shadows projected in great deformed blotches on the floor.

Sam opened the note and held it to the light.

"I'm not bluffing," he said "Here it is."

Halvord thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his raincoat. His expression did not change.

"Yes," he agreed, "there it is. And I'll have it back now, Powers, if you please!" His right hand slid from his

pocket, revealing a chunky automatic. "Now!" he repeated.

They stood there, only inches from each other; and Sam could read no hint of uncertainty, no slightest fear of consequences in Halvord's reptilian eyes. For there were no witnesses. And Halvord was ready to gamble that he could clear himself with a plea of self-defense, as many a murderer has done.

But Sam was ready to gamble too.

"You wouldn't dare shoot!" he scoffed.

"Quit stalling," Halvord warned dispassionately. "Or else!"

"Okay!" said Sam. And standing there eye to eye, with the automatic covering him, his calked boot smashed down squarely across Halvord's foot!

Halvord's hand—both hands, indeed—flew up. He fired once, as his mouth gaped open in a strangled cry of agony. But the pressure on the trigger was purely an undirected muscular contraction. Untouched, Sam wrenched the automatic from the engineer's grasp and flung him back against the wall.

"Damn you!" Halvord cried. "You've smashed my foot!"

"I hope so," Sam admitted cheerfully.

Coolly he seated himself at the commissary clerk's desk, found pen and paper, and scratched off a few sentences.

AS he finished, feet came pounding up the steps. The sheriff, plainly rattled, though game, burst into the room.

"There was a shot in here!" he stated challengingly, as if he looked for some glib denial of that fact.

"A harmless experiment," grinned Sam. "But you're just in time to witness a signature, if you'll be so kind." He stepped aside and motioned to the Superpower manager.

White-faced, Halvord hobbled to the desk. He quickly scanned the page that Sam had written and faced about.

"You expect me to sign this?" he snarled.

"Now," said Sam. "Or else!"

The engineer hesitated briefly, then snatched up the pen. Below Halvord's signature, the sheriff scrawled his name. Sam folded the paper, placed it carefully in his wallet, and stepped outside.

The rain had stopped. He heard the surcharged roar of Long Bend River now. And down there along the bank, voices shouted back and forth and rag torches moved about. The drive was on!

Satisfied, Sam Powers trudged across the clearing to where Meacham waited. A deputy had taken Shamlin away, and obviously old J. K. had not heard the recent shot. He stood alone, sopping wet, gaunt and unkempt as an old coyote. But a queer shine filled his eyes as he listened to the sounds of activity below.

He turned with an ungracious scowl, however, as Sam approached.

"Well?" he rasped.

"Halvord," Sam reported, "has agreed to put his men back to work tomorrow. And Superpower will foot the bill for caring for those injured in both camps, as well as pay them full wages while they're laid up."

"Adequate," grudged Meacham, his eyes boring into Sam. "You're learning, Powers—a little at a time. In fact, I'm—ah—considering making you woods superintendent when we move up the coast. Under my supervision, you understand, of course."

The quick smile left Sam Powers' lips. He understood, all right! Tonight, for the first time, he'd taken the bit in his teeth, and he felt he'd done a first-rate job. Before that, he'd always taken orders and been kept on the defensive, it seemed to him. Two years behind State's patchwork line. Then the depression and the tough climb to his present post—learning, surely, but with Meacham heckling him and smothering his initiative at every turn. . . . Damned if he'd take it any more!

"Thanks," he said quietly. "But if you can't give me authority to try out my own ideas, I don't want the job."

"But you're inexperienced, green as grass!" shrilled old J. K. "For instance,"—he snatched up a peavey-handle lying on the ground,—"these were an excellent idea, of course, but you ordered clear stock, when culls would have done just as well!"

"But I've sold them, as is, to Halvord," protested Sam, "for his grading crew. It's in the agreement he just signed."

"At cost?"

"Plus ten per cent—to take care of overhead!"

OLD J. K.'s thin lips relaxed in a rare and remarkably human smile. From his pocket he drew two frayed cigars and poked them out at Sam.

"Have one," he said, almost graciously. "I'm hard to handle,—and don't forget it,—but those peaveys have me licked!"

"Watch my smoke," grinned Sam.

Men in the Air

Mr. Tytler of Edinburgh, the first person to navigate the air in England, in August last, announces that he will endeavour to cross the Channel by air at an early date in his fire-balloon, and thus keep the honour from falling into American or French hands.

—London *Chronicle*, December, 1784

BLANCHARD thrust the newspaper across the table, with an angry snort.

"Read that, Doctor!" he exclaimed. "There's the fellow who was prowling around last week and asking questions! I want you to get hold of him and stop this nonsense!"

The child-wife of Blanchard, the sad swarthy little peasant girl who spoke no

"Curse or Blessing?"—the second story in this series following the conquest of the air, deals with the first flight across the English Channel.

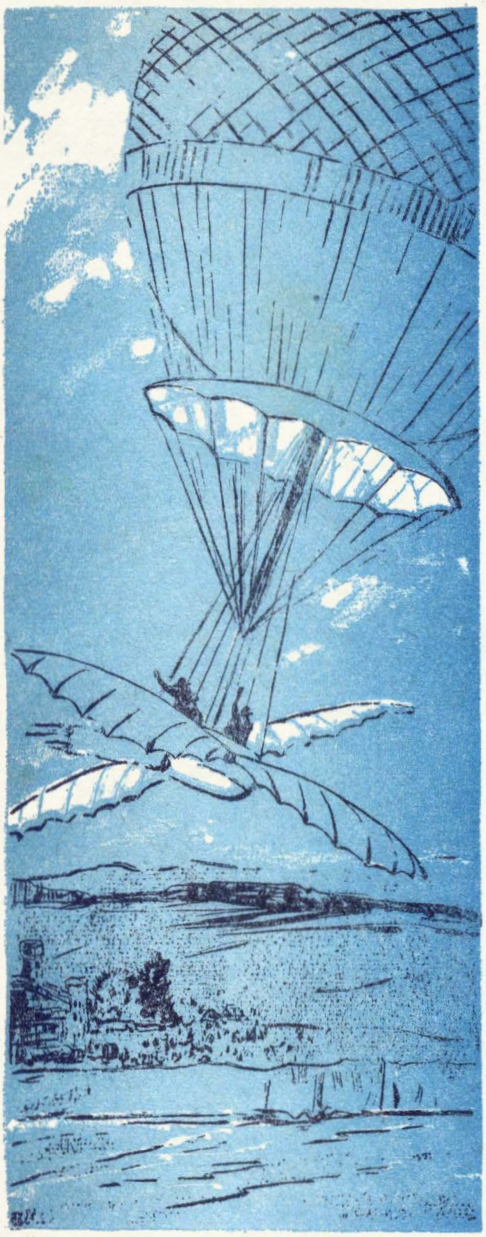
By MICHAEL GALLISTER

English, looked on wonderingly. Jefferies read the item; a whimsical expression came into his pleasant features, and he gave Blanchard a smile.

"Stop him? My dear fellow, how can I stop him? We're in England; it's a free country. Who is this Tytler, anyway?"

"A fool," growled Blanchard. "He has a silk bag with a firepan, on the Montgolfier principle; he made a half-mile flight at Edinburgh in August. He's mounted a sail on the balloon. I want you to see him, buy him off, anything! You're an American, you can deal with these accursed English. Go to any lengths, do you understand?"

Jefferies nodded, compressing his lips slightly. He did not love the vehement Blanchard. No one did, even the lit-



"We're accursed, accursed!" screamed Blanchard. "We're done, d' you hear?"

tle swarthy girl-wife. The Norman was harsh, intensely selfish; he would get ahead in the world.

"Where can this fellow be found?" asked Jefferies.

"At the farm of one Hogarth, two miles outside Dover. He told me."

"Most ill-advised of him," commented Jefferies dryly. "What do you expect me to do—kill him?"

"If necessary." Blanchard leaned forward with a torrent of passionate speech. "Look! You know very well that if I succeed in this project, I'm made for life. The first man to cross the Channel by air will be famous; it means rewards. It means that the hydrogen-gas balloon takes the place of the fire-balloon of Montgolfier. Above all, it means vast publicity! I shall be the greatest professional aëronaut in the world; I shall teach my wife to take the air—the first woman to fly! Wealth!"

Jefferies smiled. "But you permit me to accompany you!"

"I need your money, my friend," said the Norman, cynically frank. "And you're a doctor, an American, not a professional aëronaut. You'll not detract from my fame, because you don't compete with me. We've made several ascensions together. We get on. Now, I pray you, look up this fellow with the queer name, today! Buy him off. Do anything!"

Dr. Jefferies took his heavy coat, his coonskin cap, hired a nag from the innkeeper, and departed, after inquiring the way to Hogarth's farm.

"Yes," he muttered to himself, "we get on. We get on! You use my money, and I'm blind to your beautiful qualities. We get on! Why? Because you're too damned egotistic to see what I'm after. Half the honor goes to America! I'll be content with that. Under the noses of the English, under your own damned long fox-nose. You're a hard-headed, practical, shrewd Norman; all you're after is the money, and you'll get it—and too late, you'll wake up to find that a Yankee has stolen half the renown and credit for America!"

He chuckled softly; a pleasant man, shrewder than he looked.

THE air was bitter, the roads icy, for it was the second day of January. Dover Castle dipped under the horizon of wintry trees, the Channel vanished, and down a narrow lane opened the farm of Hogarth, snow-wrapped, smoke curling from chimneys of the old stead and from another building behind it.

A young woman came out to meet him, wiping her hands. Her appearance startled him: she lacked the subservience of the lower classes; she was alive with a rosy coloring, and intelligence sparkled in her eyes—she was, in a word, a charming and beautiful person.

"Good morning!" Jefferies removed his cap. "Is this Mr. Hogarth's farm?"

"It is," she said brightly, and paused.

"My name is Jefferies," he said. "I've

come from Dover to see a young man named Tytler. I understand he's here."

AGAIN he was startled. She flashed into hostility; but as she met his gaze, this died. She surveyed him coolly, appraisingly, and smiled.

"You're the American physician—the friend of the Frenchman, Blanchard!"

"Companion," said Jefferies in his whimsical way, "would be a better word, perhaps."

She caught his meaning. He had the instant impression that he was dealing with no country lass; indeed, her very speech proved as much. She spoke impulsively.

"Come in, do! There's no one here except Granny Hogarth, and she's deaf. Oh, I do believe you'll help me; you're the very person!"

Jefferies dismounted. She held out a hand and went on before he could reply:

"I'm Julia Hogarth. This was my grandfather's farm; my father's a surgeon in London. Do you know James—I mean Mr. Tytler?"

"Not at all," rejoined the American. Her face cleared. She made a hurried, imperative gesture, and he stepped into the house. The room was neat, attractive, with a tiny fire blazing in the grate.

"You spoke of helping you," said Jefferies, throwing off his greatcoat. "Consider me at your service, I beg of you, Miss Hogarth. You say your father's a surgeon? Good! There's a bond between us."

She was gazing at him wide-eyed, her bosom rising and falling with her quick breath, a tinge of excitement in her cheeks.

"I can trust you, I know it!" she exclaimed. "It'll have to be now, now, before you see him! Or—no, wait! Better still, come and talk with him. I'm driving in to town. I'll go, and wait for you at the crossroads. We can talk there, freely."

Jefferies bowed slightly. "As you like. Secrets, perhaps?"

"Yes. Cruel secrets." Agitation showed in her eyes. "He—he's a distant relative. We hope to be married. That's why he's using this place. Oh, it's terrible, I know! But you may be the one person to help me. Come, I know he'll be glad to see you. He's out in the old cow-pen—we tore off the roof, you see."

Jefferies did not see, but he was by this time curious at her manner.

He followed her out through the kitchen, where a sharp-eyed old woman was at work, and outside past the barn to another building,—four walls, no roof,—from which smoke was ascending. The girl's voice lifted cheerily.

"James! Here's a visitor for you! An American!"

A young man appeared. At the visitor's name, his face lit up, and he clasped the hand of Jefferies warmly, eagerly. He had strong, fine features, the eyes of a dreamer, an enthusiast; he was the picture of impulsive and generous youth.

"Welcome, a thousand times welcome!" he exclaimed. "I missed you in Dover; I hadn't the heart to go back and try to find you. Mr. Blanchard is not exactly—well—"

"Not the most cordial of men, with a rival," finished Jefferies, a twinkle in his eye.

He was dragged into the workshop; the girl disappeared; Tytler plunged into a glowing exposition of his plans, his apparatus, his ambitions. He had no secrets, no jealousies. But he had determination. The American, however, was somewhat appalled by what he saw.

IT was not yet two years since Montgolfier's first balloon, barely a year since the first flight of man; but the world was balloon-mad. On every hand the imagination of men had been set aflame. The most imbecile of ascensions and inventions were tried, and at the same time the wisest heads of science had gone to work. The hot-air bags of Montgolfier, kept aloft by a continual burning of straw under the bag, were already out of date.

Blanchard hoped to kill these bags forever, with the rubber-coated bag filled with hydrogen gas that the physicist Charles had invented. To the same man were due the anchor or grapnel for landing, the rip-cord, the network of cordage that surrounded the bag to equalize the strain and hold the basket below, the trailing sleeve, the use of a barometer to judge heights, the small wicker basket instead of a huge ill-balanced platform carrying a stove—and Blanchard had all these things.

Tytler had none of them.

"I've just been experimenting with straw, soaked with various fluids," he said, pointing to his blazing fire. "I want to provoke a hotter flame, since mere smoke alone will not do the work."

Jefferies repressed a shiver as he looked at the balloon, deflated but sus-

pended from a wire high above, with its decorations of flags and gay bunting, and an enormous silk wing.

"Is that the apparatus you used at Edinburgh?"

"That's the darling!" With proud affection, Tytler caressed the silken folds. "I did have bad luck, I admit; the silk was so porous it would not contain the hot air, until I found a varnish that would do the work. Now it's all right. Of course, I've only been up the one time, but this Channel crossing is a certainty, with the prevailing winds steady."

A certainty of death, thought Jefferies. The bag was too small; it could not possibly carry the man, and sufficient straw to keep its fires alight. He said as much.

"No, no! I've proved otherwise!" cried Tytler, with bursting confidence. "I've been up at the end of a rope for hours—believe me, I know! Also,"—he pointed to the silk wing,—"I'm going to use this sail, to increase the speed."

JEFFERIES was no scientist, but he had common sense, and had made several flights with Blanchard. He tried to point out that a balloon does not sail through the air like a ship through water, that it moves only with the air, and therefore a sail was of no value whatever. Tytler heard him out, but shook his head, smiling.

"No, my dear Doctor, I've tried this out too, and I'm sure!" he exclaimed.

"What's your purpose, if I may ask, in this flight?"

"The flight itself!" Tytler said. He flung more wood on the fire to warm the place. Jefferies got out his pipe. Insensibly the two men had become friends.

"Two objects, really," confessed Tytler. "First, the flight; an Englishman should be the first to fly the Channel. Second, to show Julia and her father, to prove myself in their eyes; they think this is all nonsense, you know. I've promised them that after this flight I'll never go in the air again. We're to be married, and it wouldn't be fair. We don't need the fame, and we've no particular need of money, you see."

"Just what," asked Jefferies, "do you expect to get out of it?"

"Achievement—the flight itself—nothing else."

An odd contrast with Blanchard, who had bragged endlessly about the honors to be heaped on him if he made it—a reception by the King, a pension, Lord knows what!

"Suppose I told you," Jefferies said slowly, "that in my opinion, if you attempted this flight, you would most certainly perish?"

Tytler laughed. "I'd go ahead, of course; I'd not believe you." Then he sobered. "You don't really think that, Doctor?"

The hard jaw, the resolute eye, warned the American.

"My dear fellow, I'm no experienced aëronaut," he evaded. "Personally, I wouldn't trust myself aloft in a fire-balloon. That's why I'm going with Blanchard. We use gas."

"I know. I've heard of it," said the other. "But tell me, why are you going?"

"To win the honor for America, or a share of it. Blanchard, I imagine, is more set on the professional aspect."

"Yes; for money," said Tytler. "He intimated as much; he seems jealous. I offered him a sporting chance, proposing that we leave at the same time, but he refused point blank. I hear that a tremendous crowd is pouring down from London for a look at your apparatus."

"And none for a look at yours?"

"Mine's not on exhibition," said Tytler, chuckling. "I'm no raree show! It's good business on your part, I admit; if you succeed, your names will be on every tongue—"

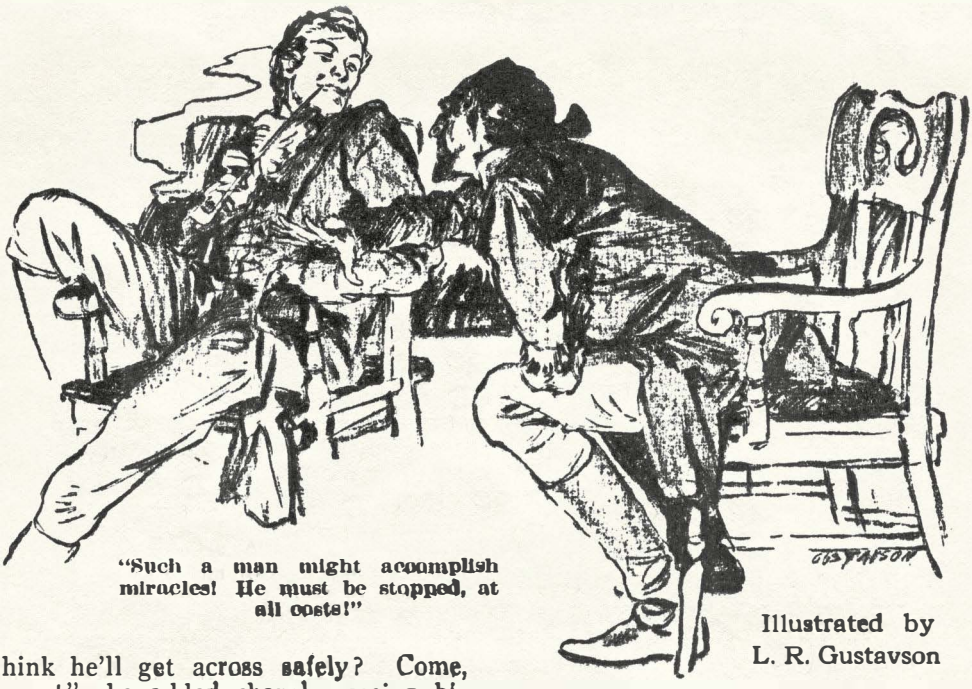
"Don't, I beg of you, couple me with Blanchard," broke in the American gravely. "He's a professional. I'm not. I don't mind saying that we'll not get off for several days, perhaps a week. We make the gas from sulphur, and haven't been able to get sufficient."

"Oh, I'll do my best to beat you, but I have much to do; the bag has some bad rips, and Julia is sewing on it," Tytler said cheerfully. "I'm setting the 7th as my starting day. I'll leave from here, quietly, with a few friends to testify, and no fuss or crowd."

Had Jefferies known then what he was soon to learn, he might have handled the talk very differently. As it was, he shook hands and rode off, vividly regretting that Tytler was not Blanchard, and leaving the young man warmed and heartened famously.

AT the crossroads half a mile away, Julia Hogarth waited, sitting in a dog-cart. She greeted him gravely, intent and determined, and came straight to the point.

"Tell me, please! You've had experience. You've seen his balloon. Do you



"Such a man might accomplish miracles! He must be stopped, at all costs!"

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

think he'll get across safely? Come, come!" she added sharply, seeing his hesitation. "I'm not asking for politeness, Dr. Jefferies. Only God knows what this means to me! Answer frankly, please!"

"Very well. That he made a half-mile flight in that contraption, looks to me like a plain unadulterated miracle," said Jefferies simply. "To start across the Channel in it, is suicide. I hinted as much, but it was breath wasted."

"Thank you," she said in a quiet, controlled voice. "He's determined to get off before you, or when you do. He's made arrangements to be informed if you leave suddenly. Nothing on earth can prevent him from trying to win this honor for England; he's rabid on the subject and—"

"What?" broke in Jefferies, smiling. "Can't you prevent him?"

"No." They were standing together, between horse and cart. She looked into his eyes for a moment, gravely. "I love him, Dr. Jefferies, and he loves me. It means everything in life to me. I want you to help me—I feel that you will, you can! There's no one else to whom I can appeal. If he attempts this action, I'm certain it means death for him."

He saw that she was trembling, and his heart went out to her.

"It does," he assented, with a troubled frown. "He's a splendid chap; but he's one of those men who thrive on opposition. What can I do? Talk is useless."

"Perhaps. But you're an American; they say Americans can accomplish anything. Help me, I beseech you!" Anguish sat in her eyes. "I'm helping him, yes; so strong is this obsession, that if I fought against it, we might both suffer, and he would go ahead anyway. I'm helping him, but I'd do anything, give anything, to stop him! Will you help me?"

"I'll do my best," said Jefferies.

"Is that the promise of an honest man, or polite evasion?" she said desperately.

"Heaven helping me, it's a promise! You're wise, you're brave, you're beautiful; do what you can with him; and if you fail—well, I'll do something!" Jefferies bowed over her fingers. "I'm at the Castle and Keys, in case you need to reach me."

"Thank you, with all my heart!" she said, and meant the words. He could feel that she meant them. It showed in her face as she stood gazing after him.

HE returned to the inn with a revulsion of feeling on meeting Blanchard. The swarthy little girl-wife, a child bought from a French peasant, admitted him to the rooms. Blanchard was in high feather. Crowds were coming down from London; a small admission fee to see the apparatus was being charged; money was rolling in.

"I've decided definitely on the 7th," he told Jefferies. "Until then, we're making money. . . . Did you see that fellow Tytler?"

"Yes." Jefferies threw off his things. With a supreme effort, he adjusted himself to this atmosphere, this environment, this accursed Norman. He knew perfect-

"Tie him up and gag him," he said in a hoarse voice.

ly well that he could not make this man appreciate or even understand his own feelings. "You've nothing to fear from him."

"Good! You bought him off?" cried Blanchard joyously.

"He won't buy off, my dear fellow. He's determined to beat us across. But there's nothing to fear, because his balloon is a joke. It's small. The silk is full of splits; it looked as though the varnish had rotted it."

The Norman relaxed with a gloomy frown, and showed a streak of his racial insight and shrewd good sense.

"You should know better. Not the apparatus is to be feared, but the man. Such a man, even with perfectly absurd apparatus, might accomplish miracles! Therefore the man must be stopped, at all costs. I can't do it. These English hate all Frenchmen, yet oddly enough they don't seem to hate Americans. They'd lose no chance to embroil me with their accursed law, but you can manage anything with impunity."

Jefferies laughed heartily at this rather naïve way of saddling him with the job.

"Very well. If there's any chance of his actually starting, I'll know it; and I'll engage to stop him."

"How?"

"Better, perhaps, if you know nothing about it; it'll be safer that way."

"True; we must not jeopardize my flight. Ah, you relieve me, my friend!" said Blanchard, embracing him warmly.

THE flight was set for the 7th, and so advertised. For weeks the prevailing winds had been from the northwest; barring a sudden change, or storm, nothing would prevent. The balloon, getting a final coat of rubber paint, was in readiness. Once the sulphur arrived, there need be no delay—but Blanchard wanted the affair properly advertised. Already Dover was crowded with nobility and even royalty, and half London would be on hand to see the start. The possibility that the great bulwark of England could be crossed by man in the air, had excited all England to a tremendous extent.

During these days, Jefferies passed from anxiety to acute alarm. One morning he met Tytler in the street; the young

man greeted him with exuberant delight, and drew him aside to display a packet.

"I've solved the great question!" he declared, opening his package. "Look! A brick of compressed straw! Soaked in spirits just before the flight, it will burn indefinitely. Half a dozen such bricks, and the problem of fuel will no longer exist!"

"Nor will you," said Jefferies bluntly. "See here! Suppose I can induce Blanchard to take you in my place, will you accept?"

"And be indebted to a Frenchman for what I can't perform? Never!" cried Tytler heatedly. He frowned at Jefferies in perplexity. "You'd do that? Why?"

"To save you from certain death."

"Upon my word!" The other broke into a laugh. "My friend, you're generous, but I fear you underestimate my abilities. The first man to cross the Channel in the air will be an Englishman, I promise you! And he'll fly alone. I hear you're definitely going on the 7th."

"Definitely."

"Very well. I too leave on the 7th!" declared Tytler, slapping him jovially on the shoulder. "I'll take no advantage. I'll leave at precisely the hour you leave, and the minute! With my sail, with my lighter weight—you'll see!"

"Man, it's rank suicide!" groaned Jefferies desperately. "You'll burn at the first gust of wind! A brick of straw soaked in spirits—good Lord, man! It can't be done!"

"They've always said men couldn't travel through the air, too," said Tytler, and went off down the street laughing, a splendid confident figure.

Obsession? No other word would serve. As Jefferies well knew, nothing is so mad as the courage of ignorance; nothing so deaf, so blind, so obdurate. And he had undertaken to combat this quality! He was tempted to let the whole thing go by default, promise or no promise. That was the road of cowardly inaction, yet, left to himself, he might have pursued it.

ON the afternoon of the 6th, he tested all, with Blanchard, in the privacy of the guarded space atop the cliff. The ascent was to be at noon on the morrow; the weather was cold but fine, the wind fair. To fight a way through the enormous crowd was difficult, and Blanchard was irritated, nervous, testy.

"What about that fellow Tytler?" he growled as they got clear of the throngs.

"Be assured; he'll make no flight."

Luckily, Blanchard did not press the matter, for Jefferies was himself on edge, and close to an explosion. But when he got back to his own lodgings, close to sunset, he walked in to find Julia Hogarth sitting there, with her old deaf granny for chaperon.

HE foresaw what was coming, and braced himself; those clear, fine eyes of hers took hold of him. He ordered up tea, with a dash of cognac for Granny, but the moment came when Julia looked him in the eye and went to the point.

"James said he saw you this morning; he told me all you said."

"Did it have any effect?" parried Jefferies.

"You know it didn't. You're going at noon tomorrow. He's leaving then, too. Four men whom he knows are coming in the morning, to help him get the balloon inflated and to serve as witnesses."

"Well?" asked Jefferies, as her gaze dwelt upon him.

"A promise—or idle politeness?"

He flung out his hands. "Confound it, what can I do? I'm helpless. You should get the law to stop him."

"This is England. He's a free man. I've done everything possible, short of wrecking our lives and our future; even that would effect nothing."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Something—anything!" Her voice broke. "I'm desperate, truly. I'd give my life, if it would just save him."

Anything! Jefferies drew a deep breath. The terror in her eyes went through him like a knife. He leaned forward, took her hand, pressed it.

"Anything! Very well. You'll not blame me—even if it's cruel?"

"I'll bless you, bless you all my life!"

"I think," he said quietly, "such a blessing would be worth much. Very well; account it done. Where does he sleep?"

"In the back room, downstairs." Her eyes widened. "But you—you'll not hurt him?"

Jefferies smiled, wondering if she realized in this moment what he must do.

"Not too badly, my dear; I'll hurt him, but I'll trust you to cure that hurt."

The look she gave him was almost a blessing in itself.

Scarcely had they departed, when Blanchard came bursting in, all aflame. He had just received a letter from friends in Calais, across the channel. If he suc-

ceeded, if he got there, Calais was going to grant him a pension, would buy his balloon and preserve it as a memorial!

"And now, my friend," he hurried on, blandly, "it has occurred to me that the voyage would be much less dangerous for one than for two. Not, you understand, that I wish to back out of our agreement—no, no! But since I owe you so much, it might be safer—"

His voice died, as Jefferies turned away and went to the bag on the chair. From the bag he took a long and heavy pistol of brass, a very handsome weapon, and came back to the Norman. His face was drawn and livid; his voice was harsh.

"I know all that's in your heart, Blanchard," he said. "You'd give much to be off without me—eh? Listen: Tonight I have work to do on your account. I'm risking life, liberty, honor, to stop that Englishman. You understand? I'll do it."

Blanchard took a step back, wet his lips, tried to speak.

Jefferies went on:

"Tomorrow at noon, I'm leaving with you. And if anything prevents me—*anything*, understand me—well, I'll put a bullet into your black heart with this pistol. Either I'll do it before you leave, or if prevented, I'll come across to France and hunt you down. Now, try any tricks if you dare!"

Blanchard, protesting it was all a terrible misconstruction put upon his words, took his departure in haste. The look in his face, as he went, brought a grim smile to the lips of the American.

"Thought you'd bilk me at the last minute, eh? You'll be a good boy now. Once we land in France, take your damned rewards and money! America flies the Channel tomorrow, despite hell or high water."

He regarded the pistol thoughtfully, then stuck it into his greatcoat pocket.

THAT evening Dr. Jefferies of America, without his famous coonskin cap, visited some questionable places. They were not hard to find in Dover. Seamen of the fleet, smugglers, hard-bitten gentry from near and far, abounded; and just now, with the crowds on hand from London for the great sight, quite a few rascals had come down from the metropolis for the pickings.

For one as shrewd as Jefferies, with the clink of sovereigns in his hand, it was no trick at all to get a couple of men willing to risk the gallows for a bit of pay.

At four in the morning, with a cold wan moon hanging over against the dawn, a coach came creaking and squeaking down the lane and halted before the Hogarth farmstead. There were no dogs on the place, as Jefferies already knew; a steady barking from some farm over the hill made no alarm here.

The three men—all of whom were masked—crunched around the house, and Jefferies pointed to the back entrance.

"He'll come bolting out there. Grab him when he comes; no damage, mind! Hit him over the head if you must, but not too hard. Remember my warnings."

"Aye, Guv'nor," was the gruff response. "Then wot?"

"A cow-pen yonder, behind the barn. You'll see the light presently. Bring him. We'll tie him up there."

HE tramped down the beaten path to the roofless structure, and there unhooded a dark lantern. The beam showed the balloon hanging limply from the high wire, which could be removed at will, and attached to its crazy platform. Going to the open fireplace of brick, Jefferies set down his lantern, got straw and sticks, and fell to work making a fire. When he had a blaze going, he picked up a strand of twisted straw, and then hesitated.

"A horrible thing to do!" he muttered. "A damnable thing—to destroy a man's dreams! Yet here, if ever, the end justifies the means. And this man is fool enough to neglect the greater vision for the lesser. Better to destroy his dreams, than allow him to break her heart. He'll soon mend."

He fired the straw twist. Two steps, and he was at the balloon, holding the flame to it.

The blaze caught the varnished silk instantly. There was a sudden swift roar; a spout of fire shot heavenward, lighting the stone walls, the snow, the buildings. For an instant, the shape of the balloon bellied out as though it were about to go up in air. Jefferies, leaping and stumbling back from that rush of intense heat, let fall the straw twist.

"Cakes of straw—soaked in spirits!" he grunted, shielding his face from the flames. "Good Lord! The first puff of wind would have set this thing off!"

Already the flames were dying, flickering upon the cordage and the platform, for the balloon had vanished, when he was aware of a shout, a clamor, a frantic agonized voice. In one corner were a

few strips of silk; the American caught them up and stood waiting. Steps came crunching, and Tytler appeared, half dressed, disheveled, his face contorted. The two masked men held him firmly, each by an arm.

The flickering fire lit up the scene. Beholding it, a low groan burst from Tytler; one glance showed him that the balloon was destroyed. He seemed about to slump down, then rallied and swung his distended eyes on the figure of Jefferies.

"You—who are you?" he blurted out.

Without responding Jefferies held out the strips of silk to the nearer man.

"Here you are. Tie him up, lads—"

"Jefferies!" The word burst from Tytler. Even the disguised voice was not sufficient to deceive him. "Good God, Jefferies! You can't have done this despicable thing!"

So terrible was his agony of incredulity, that Jefferies involuntarily took a backward step. Tytler strained to loose his arms; his contorted face was livid.

"False friend, false friend!" he panted out, interspersing his words with bitter oaths. "I might have expected this from an American! Oh, you devil! And you played so fair, with your fine ways and words! You knew I'd beat you, and this is your answer—put me out of the race, you and your damned French friend!"

Jefferies handed over the silken strips.

"Tie him up and gag him," he said in a hoarse voice. "Quick about it."

"Gag me? By God, you'll not!" screamed out Tytler in a sudden passionate outburst of frenzy. "I'll have the law on you! I'll stop you—I'll do it myself, you unspeakable scoundrel—"

BUSIED with the silk strips and the frenzied man, the two captors had small chance. One slipped. Tytler kicked the leg at his other side, burst free, and hurled himself forward. He caught up a shovel and flung himself at Jefferies, all in an instant, with a sweep of his weapon that spelled murder.

"A curse on you! Neither of you will ever reach France—neither of you!" he screamed.

He dropped limply. Jefferies, with one nimble duck and spring, was inside the murderous blow; the brass pistol struck Tytler over the head. Sobbing, he fell and lay quiet.

The American stepped back. The two masked men were staring at him.

"Wot's this?" said one. "Lumme, Guv'nor! You bean't no Amurrican?"

"Don't be silly, lads; this poor fellow is out of his head," said Jefferies calmly. "Besides, you're in for it now—your best chance is to go ahead. Tie his arms, and take him out to the coach. Mind, drive up-country fast and far. Don't let him loose until eleven of the clock at least. Here, put this silver in his pocket, give him this coat of mine, and let him go. Somewhere in the country, mind. And here's your pay."

Gold clinked. Silver and the greatcoat, for Tytler. The two lugged him out to the coach. One took the box; the other went inside with the prisoner. A gruff farewell, and the coach trundled away.

Jefferies walked back the two miles to Dover, and when he got there in the sunrise his face was white and strained.

AT noon, as a gun boomed out from the castle, the vast crowd roared acclaim; and the majestic balloon, two figures in the car, soared up and away on the wind, out over the water from the cliffs, out toward France.

And as though a curse were upon it, the balloon bore ever downward toward the Channel waves. Up, as ballast went out, then down again. An hour later, the last of the ballast was gone, the waves were not twenty feet below, and the coast of France was still two miles away.

"We're accursed, accursed!" screamed Blanchard, though he knew nothing of that morning's work. Frantically, he pitched overboard food, instruments, anchor. A bound up, and then down again. The shore was a mile distant.

Blanchard looked at his imperturbable, silent companion.

"We're done, d'you hear? One last hope! Cut loose the basket, and cling to the ropes. We may ride with the bag to the shore. Ready?"

His knife was poised. Suddenly Jefferies checked him, pointed. The waves were receding. The balloon, for no apparent cause, was going up and up! A sudden gust of wind caught it and took it toward France. It was actually rising!

Jefferies looked back at the English sky. A sigh broke from him; joy was in his eyes. Blanchard yelled excitedly that they were over Calais, were safe!

"Aye, safe," said Jefferies. "A blessing's stronger than a curse, any day!"

And perhaps it was—who knows?

A thrill-crammed story based on the first parachute jump,—which occurred in 1797—will appear in an early issue.

Riders for a

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Illustrated by
Peter Kuhlhoff

IN the first hour of the afternoon Dion O'Connor drew rein and brought the two horses to a stop at the crossroads where the old adobe blacksmith shop stood, a solitary landmark on the wide valley flat. It was a hot day in late spring; the only sounds were the metrical clinking of the smith's hammer and the drowsy calling of wild doves. The mustard was in blossom and the lowlands were like a sea of bright gold, with dark green islands where the groves of live oaks rose against the cloudless sky.

The span of thoroughbreds were dancing against the taut reins; threads of dampness showed upon their glossy coats. Pete Rodriguez, the vaquero, came out of the blacksmith shop. When he saw Dion in the driver's seat, his eyes grew warm with recognition. He stepped between the wheels, his hand outstretched, and Dion reached forth to grasp it.

In that moment, just before danger revealed its presence, the two men were silent with the happiness of meeting: the young lawyer in his blue frock coat, pinched tightly at the waist, starched linen and tall beaver hat under whose flaring rim blond locks were curling rebelliously; the swarthy horseman with his breeches tucked into his boot tops, his rag of a shirt wide open over his chest, the flat-topped sombrero hanging precariously to the back of his head.

The clinking of the blacksmith's hammer was music; the voices of the wild doves were sweet and drowsy; there was not a breath of air stirring and the mustard glowed like molten gold. On the slopes of distant foothills patches of dwarf lupine and wild poppies lay below a white house, with green window shutters and a pillared veranda before its front door. California in late spring; it was three thousand miles away from the Virginia hills where lines of blue and lines of gray were deploying beneath thick clouds of sour powder-smoke. But the repercussions of the great conflict were reaching a long way.

It was Pete who saw danger, and his smile vanished. He said:

"Easy, Dion. Something's wrong."

He started toward the horses' heads, his movements unhurried.

Horses, so Dion was thinking, always liked Pete. These two high-strung geldings of Kentucky trotting stock, who had

Lost Cause

A short and vivid novel of California and the Civil War in the Far West.

been a handful for Dion all the way from San Jose, stood as docile as dogs while the vaquero passed beside them. He reached their heads; he laid hold of the reins.

"Get out, Dion."

After the lawyer had complied, the two men unhitched the team. Pete tied them at the hitching-rack and returned to the buggy. He placed his hand upon one of the singletrees—and the three-foot billet of hickory which had held the near horse to the light carriage, came free at his touch.

"If that had happened on the grade," he said, "you'd've been out of luck."

DION'S eyes went to the house on the hill; they took in the ribbon of gray road which wound up the steep slope. He had a brief vision of plunging animals and tangled harness, of a smashed buggy where the sheer bank dropped away beside the wagon track. Pete was examining the iron bolt which had served to hold the singletree. He handed it to Dion: the metal had been cut until only a thread had remained intact; the broken edges of this portion showed plainly; they were no fresher than the cut.

"I think somebody in San Jose don't like you, Dion," Pete said.

"No one knew that I was coming." Dion's face wore a bewildered look. "An hour before I left San Francisco yesterday morning, I didn't know it myself."

While he was speaking his mind went to the summons which had brought him, and his eyes went to the white house on the hill where the writer of that letter was awaiting him. It was only a line:

"Dion dear," it said, *"I need you badly. Please come at once."* And she had signed it simply, *Irene.* When he had read it in the law office he had felt the presence of danger; but the dread which had caused him to hire relays of fast horses last night, instead of waiting for the stage, was for the girl, not for himself.

"Besides," he added aloud, as if in answer to his own thoughts, "the only man I saw this morning in San Jose, who knew me, was Sam Anderson, the banker. He loaned me the horses and rig."

"You've been away four years," Pete said softly. "I donno if you hear these things that go on in the valley now."

"Such as?" Dion asked.

The vaquero glanced over his shoulder before he answered, to be sure there was no one else within earshot.

"It began right after Fort Sumter, when Judge Terry and Senator Gwin and the rest of that crowd rode through on their way back East to join the Rebel army. All the Southern Democrats was making their brags California was going to pull out of the Union inside of six months. But they don't make the loud noise any more, Dion. They are holding secret meetings."

"The Knights of the Golden Circle." Dion nodded his head. "We're watching them."

"No," Pete said. "This here is not the Knights of the Golden Circle. Mebbe some of the Copperheads. Yes. They ride out into the hills at night. Yo' remember Fiddletown, Dion, and did yo' know that it seceded from the State of California at the beginning of the war?"

"I heard of it." Dion's voice carried a note of amusement.

"It wasn't so fonny as yo' think," the vaquero assured him. "They said down here that it was a joke. But those fellows, they meant business. Jost try and ride into that place after dark sometime if yo' do not believe that. That's where these men are going. And there is one who came last spring. He came from Missouri. His hair and his beard, they are red like fire. They say he was with Quantrell, the Rebel bushwhacker."

"Well," Dion demurred, "I don't see how this ties up with that singletree."

"The bolt is cut with a col' chisel," the vaquero murmured. "And there are men in the valley who remember you, Dion. They read in the papers from San Francisco, the speeches you have made, and how you give these California Copperheads hell when they talk against the government in Washington. The papers say that no man makes the better speeches, not even Thomas Starr King. I think mebbe some of those fellows would feel pretty good if you got smashed op, an' if you get killed they would not cry."

"Sam Anderson's a loyal Union man," Dion said. Pete merely shrugged.

"I'll take this to the shop and fix it," he announced and departed with the singletree. When he returned a few minutes later—

"You go to Morgan's?" he asked. And when Dion nodded, he remarked dryly: "Tha's good."

And shortly afterward Dion drove on toward the western foothills, to the white house among the live oaks which mantled the summit three miles away.

CHAPTER II

THE house on the hill stood all alone among the spreading live oaks. At the foot of the knoll there were other buildings: a huge barn, the unpainted bunkhouses where the vaqueros slept, several sheds and the inevitable corrals. From the summit these looked remote, a portion of the surrounding landscape, like the cattle which trailed along in single file on their way to and from the water-troughs in early morning and late afternoon.

It was a large house and the tall pillars of the veranda before the front door made it more imposing, but when you came close to it you saw that some of the paint was beginning to peel; the gravel driveway was in need of attention. The general atmosphere was that same genteel shabbiness, that down-at-the-heels pride, which was beginning to show so frequently at this same time in mansions of similar architecture, as it did also in wide-hatted, cheroot-smoking old gentlemen, in Southern States three thousand miles away.

AND the rider who came up the winding road while Dion O'Connor and Pete Rodriguez were examining that singletree at the blacksmith shop down in the valley, looked as if he might belong to such a place. For his hat was wide and black, its crown was carefully creased; his tie was the black string bow which marked the men from south of the Mason and Dixon line. His dragoon boots were polished to the knees. But his home state was Missouri; he was a sojourner in the valley, where his presence was breeding trouble throughout a neighborhood already rendered restless by the sharp schisms of war's politics.

A young man, still in his late twenties; his face was lean, his gray eyes were filmed with the peculiar veil which hides the lurking light of fanaticism. The sunshine touched his long hair under the wide hat's rim; it touched his pointed goatee, and they showed like spots of flame. He looked like a red-headed, youthful Don Quixote, but there was that about him which said he was accustomed to dealing with hotter and more practical foes than windmills. To this the papers which he carried in the inner pocket of his frock coat bore witness in the statement that he was commissioned as a captain in the service of the Confederate States of America: Captain John Steele. Not more than fifty men in the whole valley consorted with him, and that was usually after nightfall when there was no one about to overhear.

Irene Morgan was in the high-ceilinged living-room when she saw him riding up the hill. It was cool in here, for the blinds on the south side were closed and the sunlight filtered through the cracks in thin streaks which shimmered on the shadowed carpet. There was a wide fireplace with a high marble mantel; there were old portraits on the papered wall; the mahogany chairs gave off a faint gleam, and there was a bowl of lush yellow roses on a center table.

Irene was a little thing and her dark hair swept down in two billowing waves that almost hid her small ears. She had long lashes and her eyes were like black

velvet. But there was nothing gentle in her lips when she looked through the eastern window and saw John Steele riding up the road.

She stood there for a moment looking at him. Then she turned and left the room. She went up the wide hallway and climbed the stairs. When she came down a few moments later she was carrying a long-barreled, large-muzzled goose-gun, one of those terrific weapons which the men used to slaughter wild fowl in the bay marshes. She carried the gun awkwardly, for its weight was great and she was slight; she took it down the hall into the huge kitchen. The old Chinese cook was busy at the stove.

"Go to your room, Sang," she bade him, and he vanished without a word.

She stood the gun on its butt in the corner beside the door which opened into the dining-room. The knocker on the front door was sounding. There was resolution in her face as she went to answer it; her eyes seemed very large. They held no light of welcome when she confronted the visitor.

His hat was in his hand, his hand beside his thigh; he had made the movement in a single wide sweep; it was an elaboration of courtesy. He did not care for women; they were, to his way of thinking, so much dead weight at the best, and at their worst, they could be a grave hindrance to weighty plans. But he rated himself as a Southern gentleman, and he was always punctilious at such moments as this. He said:

"Evenin', Miss Mo'gan. I trust yo' are in good health." She nodded and he went on quickly, "Tom's home?"

"My brother," she told him, "saddled up this morning and rode away. He didn't say where he was going." And then she added, "You'll come in, won't you, and have a bite to eat?"

SHE knew he had ridden from San Jose, and she was pretty sure her invitation would meet acceptance, as indeed it did. In those days in California a man took it for granted that he was going to get a meal or a night's lodging at the house of any acquaintance.

Nevertheless Steele made proper protest. "I wouldn't think to trouble yo'."

She would have bitten her lips at the vexation it cost her to reassure him, if she had not feared to betray the feelings which were seething within her. And she managed to smile sweetly as she led him back to the dining-room.

It was a long room, paneled with redwood which had been waxed and polished, and the paneling had been darkened by the years. At either end there was the head of an elk and on the sides there were clusters of feathered game which had been mounted with skill.

Steele seated himself at the table.

"Just a bait, Miss Mo'gan," he bade her. "I must be ridin' back to town right soon."

IRENE departed silently and was absent in the kitchen for awhile. When she returned with coffee and cornbread and cold meat her cheeks were blanched, her eyes were blazing with excitement; but he did not look up at her; he was engrossed in his own large projects. Nor did he notice her departure a few moments later; he was eating with the gusto of a man who has been hungered by the out-of-doors; he was gazing out of the window and he was seeing visions which were born of bold hopes. It was her voice which brought his mind back to the dining-room and to the knowledge of his danger. She said:

"If you make a move, Captain Steele, I'm going to kill you."

A soft voice ordinarily, as sweet as the voices of the wild doves which were calling to one another on the tawny hillsides, but there was no sweetness in it now; it was hard and cold. He knew that she meant exactly what she said. Nevertheless he did move. He shifted in his chair and turned his head. He saw her finger gliding inside the clumsy trigger guard. He saw the huge muzzle of the old goose-gun staring at him.

"Why, Miss Mo'gan!" He said it with grave courtesy. If he felt fear, there was no sign of it in his face.

"Don't stir," she bade him sharply.

"Indeed I won't." His eyes searched hers. "What do yo' aim to do?"

The weapon was so large and she was so small that the contrast would have been comical, had it not been for the set look in her white face and for her voice when she replied. She spoke in a dead monotone:

"I'm going to keep you here while I send word to Sheriff Wheeler in San Jose. When he comes, I'm going to turn you over to him. I'm going to tell him what I know. And, if you try to get away, I'm going to kill you."

While she was speaking, his eyes began to widen. His face changed. There was fear in that look. He was staring

at something behind her, and in that moment while he was doing this bit of acting, playing a time-worn trick, luck came to his aid. The timbering in the house was redwood and somewhere behind her one of the boards cracked as redwood boards so often do with a change in temperature. The sound was startling.

Steele cried out sharply:

"No, yo' must not do that to a woman!" His eyes were filled with pretended horror. And Irene turned her head.

He was bending low when he leaped; his hand seized the long barrel of the goose-gun and he flung it upward just as the big muzzle belched a stream of flame. The report was deafening in the closed room. The handful of coarse shot tore a hole in the ceiling. The air was sour with the hot smell of burning powder and the smoke was like a fog.

Steele wrested the weapon from the girl's hands and leaned it against the paneled wall. When he faced her again she was standing with clenched fists; her breast was heaving, her lips were parted. He regarded her for a moment in silence. Then he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"I bid yo' good evenin', Miss Mo'gan." He walked stiffly to the hallway. She heard the front door close a little later and after that, the footfalls of his departing horse were faintly audible. As she was listening to them, her limbs seemed to collapse. She flung herself into a chair and bowed her head. She was sitting there with her face hidden in her arms when Dion O'Connor entered.

AT sound of his footstep she raised her head and saw him standing in the doorway. She flung herself into his arms and wept as if her heart would break. He held her close, he stroked her hair and neither of them spoke for a long time. It had been four years since they had seen each other. She had grown to womanhood and he had changed greatly, but it seemed to him that he had been awaiting this moment ever since he could remember: to press her to him and to hold her in his protection; it had been his wish even while they were youngsters on neighboring ranches. And now that it had come, now that he had attained the consummation of his long-ago daydreams, he found himself intent on other things: the ragged hole in the paneled ceiling, the reek of cold powder-smoke which was still in the room, the huge goose-gun standing in the corner; the memory of that horseman whom he had passed while driving up the hill; her letter which had brought him in such haste from San Francisco.

"Oh, Dion," she sobbed at last, "I needed you!"

"Sit down," he bade her gently, "and tell me about it, Irene."

His arm was still around her while he led her to the chair. There had never been a word of love between them, but now it was as if they had spoken so often of what was in their hearts that it had become an old story. He drew up a chair beside her and he listened to the recital of the thing that had happened here before he came.

WHEN she had finished, Dion asked: "And what would you have told the Sheriff, dear?"

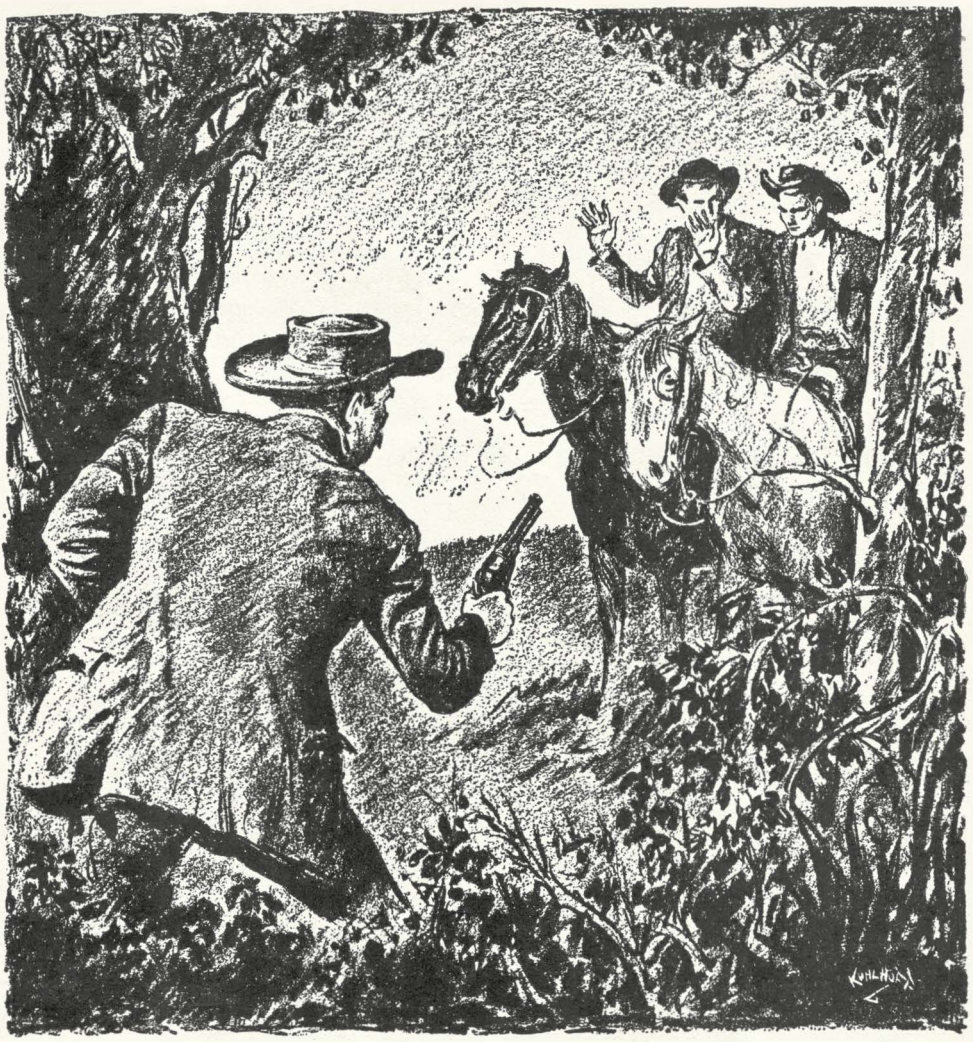
"To arrest Steele for treason," she answered swiftly.

"When I went away four years ago," he reminded her, "you were all for the South."

"It's Tom," she told him. "The Confederate cause is dear to me, but my brother is dearer. That's why I wrote you, Dion. There's something going on here in the valley. I noticed it last spring, when Steele first came, and Tom's been mixed up in it from the outset. He's let go of everything else; the ranch is running to ruin entirely. When it first began, he'd ride out in the evening and be gone all night; now there are days at a time when I don't see him. I spoke to Sam Anderson about it a few weeks ago, Dion. He's handling the property as administrator for Father's estate, you know. He told me not to worry, that he'd look after Tom. But everything is growing worse.

"It's not the property that I'm worrying about, although that's bad enough; but there's something that I'm afraid of, something desperate. One day I happened to go up into the attic, and I found half a dozen muskets there. And this morning, before daylight, I was awakened by horses, Dion. I went to my window and I heard voices—Tom's voice and another man's. And the other man was saying:

"'We'll make Joaquin Murietta and those old bandits look cheap.' That was all I got except a word or two. The two of them rode away right afterward. You see, I'd already written to you, begging you to come, because I was so frightened. It was for Tom, you under-



A voice said: "Light off, the both of yo', before I shoot."

stand. He's changed, Dion; he isn't the Tom you used to know at all. And when he went away this morning, it made me desperate. That's why I tried to capture Steele. It was a foolish thing, but when I saw him riding up the hill and remembered how he'd started all this trouble, and when I thought of Tom, off on some wild project that is sure to lead straight to prison—or worse—"

She faltered, and Dion said quietly:

"There now. Don't worry. I'll look after Tom." His voice was filled with assurance, and while he sat there beside her, giving her what comfort he could think of, he was smiling with his lips and with his eyes, but there was no smile in his heart; for during all of that time, the back of his mind was busy with various things: with Sam Anderson, the banker, who had the handling of the ranch property, who had loaned him that span of thoroughbred colts and a buggy with a singletree that some one had cut more than halfway through; with a young red-bearded horseman who had ridden under Quantrell in Missouri; with Tom Morgan and his wild visions of loot and bloodshed. He thought he knew the purpose behind all of this plotting. And he knew that the thing which he had promised was not going to be easy to fulfil. Before he went he asked one question:

"Those nights when Tom was away, Irene— Have you any idea where he went? Was there anything you overheard?"

She thought for some moments in silence and at last she nodded.

"I remember now. It was John Steele who said it last week: 'In a few days now, they'll be ready in Fiddletown.'"

CHAPTER III

THE two saddle-horses were traveling at an easy running walk, mouthing the heavy Spanish bits. The voice of Pete Rodriguez rose above the steady *clop-clop* of their hoofs.

"It's the only bet we got, Dion: the brother of my cousin's wife. He is wild, that one, and last summer when he robs the stage at Morgan Hill, the Sheriff is after him pretty close. His hoss is plumb beat out and he rides up to my house. So, because he is one of the family and we do not like to see him hung, I give him a fresh hoss. I think mebbe he will remember this."

There was a little wind stirring. It came in cool puffs where the road plunged into narrow folds of the hills in whose recesses clumps of bay trees made deep gloom; the stars yielded a vague light.

"It is luck for us," Pete went on, "that he should live where it is handy for his business, and that is outside of the town. I do not think it would be so wise to ride into Fiddletown at night if yo' are a stranger."

The road took a sharp turn, surmounting a crest of the foothills. The two men reined up their horses and looked down into the amphitheater where a few scattered lights betrayed the village which had seceded from the Union by formal resolution of the people a year before, and so far as official records are concerned, remains seceded to this very day.

"I remember," Dion said, "there used to be a saying that these people used 'possums for housecats. Well, this thing they did is natural enough, but I can't understand why they are allowed to carry on openly. What about the Sheriff and the Committee of Public Safety?"

"See now," Pete reminded him. "We have been riding since the crack of day and it is long after dark. The Sheriff, he is keeping on the jump down in the valley. And the Committee of Public Safety—" There was a pause; it was so eloquent that Dion seemed to see Pete shrugging. "They have divided the country into districts, and Sam Anderson looks after Fiddletown."

Dion made no reply; he was thinking of the bolt which held that singletree, cut more than halfway through by a cold chisel. There were many elements in the situation which he could not understand, and Sam Anderson was one of them. When they were riding down the hill a few moments later he asked:

"Why did this relation of yours come here to live? Is he a Copperhead, Pete?"

The vaquero laughed. "I do not think so, Dion. I do not think he gives a damn about the war. But it is a nice place to live for one who does not like to see the Sheriff. He is a smart man; he likes to play the both ends against the middle. I think it is like that. We turn off here."

They left the road to make a wide detour along the hillside through wild oats which rose above the horses' knees. Now and again they passed close by an outlying cottage and once a dog barked fiercely. In this manner they circled around the edge of the village, and when they went by the end of the brief main street, they had a glimpse of a church with its sharp spire standing out against the stars. The house of Pete's cousin's wife's brother stood in a little draw with low ridges on either side—one of those old-fashioned adobe houses which the Spanish Californians had built in early days. It was surrounded by huge sycamores, their leaves rustling in the night breeze. A single light was burning in a window and the two riders had hardly reined up before a voice called: *"Quien es?"* The light went out as the challenge was being delivered. The vaquero answered promptly in Spanish:

"It is me, Pete Rodriguez. I bring a friend."

A MOMENT of silence; the light came on again, was followed by the noise of a heavy bar being withdrawn and the door swung wide. The brother of Pete's cousin's wife came forth. He stepped aside into the shadow of the building and he stood there for a brief space, his head bent forward, regarding them, and Dion caught the dull glint of a pistol-barrel in his hand. Then the man strode out into the starlight.

A blocky man, short in the legs. His features were large and blunt; the mouth was a straight gash; his coarse hair stood erect like a mass of straw-colored spikes. There was no trace of either Presidio Spanish or valley Indian about him. There was something in that formidable face which hinted that he would be equally ready for frolic or for fight, and when he spoke his voice suggested the rasping of rusty metal. He said:

"Better we talk out here, men. My wife's got the Mamita with her tonight. There's a baby due by morning. And the Mamita, she's like all these midwives—she likes to peddle gossip."

"You have your trouble," Pete Rodriguez said; "it is too bad for us to come to you." But the other interrupted:

"I'm getting used to babies. This one will be number six. And the women know their business, Pete. What's on your mind?"

"This," the vaquero told him, "is Dion O'Connor. He is my friend." With which the introduction ended, but when Dion grasped the hand which was extended, he recalled certain placards printed on white cloth, which he had seen tacked to building walls before he left the valley four years ago. It was a substantial mark of Pete's confidence in bringing him face to face with Bill Minor, who was worth five hundred dollars to the man who could deliver him to the Sheriff, and he felt no resentment for the failure to complete the amenities of formal presentation.

"He is my friend," Pete reiterated, "and he is in trouble. He will tell yo'."

SO the three seated themselves on the tongue of a wagon, and when Bill Minor had listened to Dion's story, he asked:

"You want to get this boy out of trouble?"

"I gave my word," Dion reminded him.

"If you're going to keep it, you've got to move fast," the stage-robber remarked dryly. He ran his fingers through his spiky hair and sat there thinking for some moments. Then he turned to Pete, and his manner was that of a man who has arrived at a resolution.

"All right. You know John Lacy's place? There's a bunch of redwoods half a mile up the cañon. If you men ride out now, mebbe you'll be in time. But it's cutting it mighty close. The gang is there, a dozen or so, and if anybody spots you the password is *Stonewall Jackson*. They're going to ride away before midnight."

"I was afraid of this," Dion muttered.

"You got a right to be afraid," the other warned him. "It's the craziest proposition I ever heard of. They're bound for the military prison at Alcatraz, that's where they're headed for. I don't mind taking chances when it comes to standing up a stage or the like of that. But this here is treason and the man that gets off with twenty years in one of them stone dungeons is in luck. I went up to the redwoods and I listened to John Steele just once; that was enough for me. He thinks he's going to lead a bunch of bushwhackers in California, like Quantrell did back in Missouri. And tonight they're riding out on the first raid."

"Where?" Dion asked.

Minor chuckled.

"Search me. That's one thing I didn't ask. I figgered that what I didn't know wasn't going to hurt me. But they're going to make a big haul—to hear them tell it."

Pete got to his feet. "Better we make our start, Dion."

"There is," Minor reminded them quietly, "more than one man in that bunch that would cut your throat the minute he got suspicious of you." He laid his hand on the vaquero's shoulder. "You know Lacy? Well, then, don't let him see you. Steele has got this gang worked up till they're all desperate, but Lacy is the worst. He's as crazy as a scalded bat."

The two of them swung into their saddles, and as they rode away the stage-robber waved his hand.

"Good luck!" he called softly and went back into the house, where his wife and the Mamita were engrossed in a large project of their own.

When he had vanished Pete asked:

"What do yo' figure to do after we get there, Dion?"

And Dion answered, "Find Tom."

"And when yo' find him?"

"I'm going to talk with him," Dion said.

"I do not like this," the vaquero muttered. "Mebbe yo' get a knife in the back. For what? For a boy that has gone crazy."

"If you don't like it, you can ride back," the other told him. "It isn't any of your affair. But I gave my word."

"If yo' want to be a fool, I have got a right to be one too," Pete growled. But Dion did not hear: he was thinking of a girl's face looking up into his own.

RETRACING the route by which they had come, they reached the point where the main street of Fiddletown became a hill road. They struck off along the wagon track and kept to it for two miles. The summits around them were growing higher, and they crossed cañons where tall redwoods grew. They were passing around the sharp turn where the track bent sharply between huge brown trunks, and the stars were hidden by a thick canopy of branches overhead. It was so dark within this shaded area that

John Lacy

they could barely distinguish each other's forms although they were within arm's-length. A voice said:

"Halt. Who goes there?"

The horses shied violently, and moments went by before they had the animals in hand. The voice again:

"Light off, the both of yo', before I shoot."

"Easy, Dion," Pete whispered. "Do like I do." He swung from the saddle and Dion followed his example. The faint rustling of brushwood followed, then the shuffle of feet in the deep dust. The form emerged out of the night. It stood within a yard of them, a silhouette in sharp black relief against the light beyond it, where the narrow road came forth upon the open hillside. Dion remembered the password which Bill Minor had given them. His voice was filled with assurance as he spoke the name of the Confederate hero, and Pete said:

"That pistol's liable to go off."

The weapon was barely visible; it swung from side to side, menacing first one, then the other. The bearer grumbled:

"Ef yo' all wasn't so slow with the countersign, yo'd've been passed and on yo' way."

"Sorry," Dion said. "Well, there's no harm done."

Just what it was that had brought suspicion to the sentry, they never knew; it might have been something in the manner of the lawyer's speech; it might have been something in his appearance. Instead of responding to the apology—

"Step fo'ward," the man bade them sharply, "into the light where I can see yo'. An' put yo' han's up."

They complied in dead silence and he backed away, holding the revolver leveled; they followed, a pace distant. So they came into the starlight and when the two prisoners emerged, the sentry gasped Dion's name.

In that instant the two men had a glimpse of his face. It was a pale face; there was a fringe of jet black beard. Dion stepped aside. His left hand came down and swept sidewise; the movement was as swift as a striking snake. His fingers clamped upon the sentry's wrist and deflected the revolver's muzzle. The vaquero snatched his own pistol from the holster; he struck twice with the heavy barrel. The sentry sank down in a heap. Pete said:

"Help me drag him off into the chaparral, Dion." And when they had flung the senseless body into the thicket, "I remember him now. He used to work for Tom Morgan's father five years ago."

"Think you killed him?" the lawyer asked.

"Mebbe," Pete said. "I donno. Better we get on before more trouble comes."

CHAPTER IV

SAM ANDERSON said: "I've kept my bargain. I always keep it, and I always manage to see that the other party keeps his. That's why I've ridden out here tonight."

"Where I come from," Captain John Steele answered coldly, "gentlemen ain't in the habit of checking up on one another fo' fear of broken bargains."

"I do not claim to be a gentleman," the banker announced simply. "But I am a good business man."

They were sitting in the bare living-room of John Lacy's bleak two-story house. Its sides were covered with split redwood shakes; the room was filled with shadows, save for the little space surrounding two home-made candles. Within this narrow oasis the light wavered over a table of hewn boards, a pair of rude benches; it glinted dully on the butts of the pistols in John Steele's belt;

his long hair and his pointed goatee glowed like flames. But the banker seemed to absorb the mellow radiance; he was more like a shadow than a man. Clad in black, with sparse hair in which gray patches were breaking out like a disease, he owned a face which seemed to have been whittled out of wood; his eyes were as opaque as stones. There was, in the manner of his speaking, a certain dull precision as colorless, as inflexibly exact—and as bereft of passion—as the clicking of one of those adding-machines which have come into use in latter years.

"You've been let alone," he went on, "just as I promised you would be when you and I talked this business over three months ago. Your company is organized and nobody's interfered with you. You're starting out on your first raid tonight, and I guess you're going to lead straight to the hangman before you're done. All right. That's your business. Now I want to know about my end of this affair."

"Meanin'," Steele said, "Tom Mo'gan."

"Meaning Tom Morgan." Sam Anderson nodded twice. "Just so."

"He rides with us," Steele answered. And he noticed that the other drew a deep breath as if he were relieved. Then he asked, "What's on yo'r mind?"

"I happen to know," the banker told him, "that someone has been trying to stop him."

The bushwhacker regarded him from under lowered lids; he was thinking of a paneled dining-room, of himself sitting at the table and of a girl holding a huge goose-gun to her shoulder—but he merely reiterated:

"Tom's with the company. He's a good man."

Anderson leaned over the table shoving his pale face out into the candlelight. His features seemed to have grown harder, and for the instant there was a semblance of light in the bleak eyes. There was something in his look, a repressed avidity, which made the other draw back instinctively.

"That's why I came. To be sure that he's still with you."

"If yo' doubt my word," Steele said stiffly, "yo' can come up to the cañon and see for yo'se'f. In fact, I insist on it. I'll have Lacy take yo' and yo' will not be seen. I'm not in the habit of havin' my word doubted, Anderson."

"This is a business matter," the banker said. "I've a right to be sure." And then he added with as near a semblance to emotion as he had ever shown, "It would make me feel more comfortable."

"It's settled," Steele told him curtly. "And now I have got to go. The boys will be in the saddle right soon." He started to rise from his chair but Anderson checked him with a gesture.

"You've got to handle young Morgan carefully. I can't afford to have this thing go wrong now."

"Tom's loyal to the cause," Steele replied, "if that's what yo're afraid of. Don't fret."

"I know what you're figuring to do," the other persisted. "And I know Tom Morgan. He's hot for it now; he's read of Quantrell in those Copperhead papers; he thinks it's all heroic, this bushwhacking, and he doesn't realize it's just plain robbery with murder thrown in—" Steele started to interrupt, but Anderson went on as if the other had not spoken: "That boy's been well raised, and if anything happened to go wrong at the start, he'd quit you in a minute."

Steele shrugged. He said: "I've seen new recruits befo' now."

The bushwhacker got up from his chair. He said:

"Lacy will fetch yo' up the cañon and show yo' to a place where yo' can look on without being seen." He bowed stiffly and departed. When he gained the outer air he spat as if to get rid of a bad taste, but the man whom he had left behind him sat alone beside the table of hewn boards and the wavering light of the candles showed a sort of wooden satisfaction on his lean face. He had been waiting for some minutes when Lacy came in the door.

WAR is a breeder of high emotions, and the Civil War brought many intense types into being on both sides of the Mason and Dixon line. The young fellow with the flaming hair and beard, who had been here a little while before, was fiery in his fanaticism; this other who came now was a fanatic of a different breed. A tall man and wide of shoulders, erect as one of those redwoods which towered in the cañon behind the house. He was dressed in the gray homespun which still existed in some parts of the country; his unblacked cowhide boots reached to his knees. His hair was a brown thatch and his face had the quality that makes one think of granite. His eyes were deep-set; they were like two black coals. His great beard swept

his chest. He was not unlike a certain other man who had gone from Osawatomie and who had found his way to martyrdom after a brief blaze of action at Harper's Ferry. He stood within the doorway gazing at the banker, and he said:

"The Lord uses His own instruments."

"I'm here on business," Anderson replied.

The big man remained unsmiling as he nodded.

"Captain Steele gave me my orders," he announced soberly. "You can see the men ride away."

THE hills were split behind John Lacy's barn; the cleft was like a narrow gateway between low cliffs of sandstone. Outside of the opening the slopes were bare of trees, bathed by vague starlight. Within it, the redwoods stood, a thick array of lofty columns surmounted by a wide canopy of evergreen branches which blotted out the sky. It was like walking from a lighted room into a black cellar. The narrow road wound upward between the huge brown trunks. John Lacy strode on ahead, following its twistings as unhesitatingly as if it were broad daylight; the banker stumbled along behind him. When they had climbed for a good half mile and Anderson was so completely spent for lack of breath that he was on the point of giving up, he saw a ruddy tinge that bathed the facework of foliage before him, and Lacy muttered:

"This way. We leave the trail here."

They plunged into the unbroken woods mounting the steeper slope of the sidehill, and a few minutes later the guide halted in the shadow of a gigantic tree, above a circular opening, a little "park" where grass grew knee-high in the light of a great fire.

"Long as you stay where you are," Lacy told the banker, "no one sees you."

The light of the flames wavered as it rose; the trunks of the great trees which surrounded the open space vanished and reappeared; the network of feathered branches seemed like a patterned ceiling overhead. A number of saddle-horses were tied at the lower end of the park; now and again one of the animals stamped and the sound of the hoofs on the soft earth was like the thud of a muffled drum. Near the upper end where the firelight was a red glare, a dozen men had arranged themselves in a line after a fashion. They were silent, regarding the man who stood before them, and in their regard there was an intentness which made up for the lack of discipline of their alignment.

So on that evening in the late springtime, as John Steele was about to lead his bushwhackers on one of the wildest of those quixotic ventures which attended the futile efforts of the Confederacy to gain a foothold in the Far West, he told them a few things about their errand and its nature. He made a bold picture, and a lonely picture, standing apart from all the others with his head thrown back, with the peculiar haze of fanaticism like a thin veil before his eyes, with the bright radiance of the flames bathing his long curling hair and his pointed beard until they glowed like red-hot metal. And the men faced him, dead silent, listening, booted and spurred; there were no uniforms; here and there among them an unbuttoned shirt revealed a hairy chest; they were all belted; in the belts the handles of bowie knives showed and the butts of cap-and-ball revolvers.

From the hillside where John Lacy was standing beside Sam Anderson, it was like looking down upon a lighted stage, and from the opposite slope it was the same. And neither of the two pairs of men who formed that slender audience to this third act of a little Civil War melodrama, dreamed that there were any other watchers save themselves. For the banker was not the only hidden visitor; the vaquero and Dion had arrived. John Lacy stepped out from the shadow of the redwood into the streak of firelight. Then Pete Rodriguez whispered:

"That's him, Dion—the man Bill Minor told us to look out for."

Dion glanced across the open space. But soon his eyes came back to search the loose rank of men for the boy whom he was seeking.

PETE and Dion were lying behind a clump of huckleberry bushes and had parted the slender stems to give them a better view. The vaquero whispered the names of the men as the firelight fell upon their faces:

"Tom Poole—used to be Sheriff in Monterey, Dion. The thickset one with the black whiskers. He hung a man after the Governor had reprieved him; said the people didn't like that fellow anyhow. And the young vaquero that's trying to raise a mustache, that's Billy Stout; he used to work down in the valley breaking hosses. Aint many that I know here. Most of 'em's from Fiddle-

town, and they never show up down in the valley; it's too far from home."

He broke off abruptly; they heard the voice of John Steele rising above the snapping of the flames and the dull stamping of the saddle-horses.

"All right, boys. We've saddled up. We're going to ride away. We're going to ride the way Quantrell's men rode back in Missouri. Before we're through, we're going to sweep the State of California. They'll hear of us from Shasta clear to San Diego.

"It's for the Stars and Bars, boys. We're going to raise the money for the cause. We're going to take the gold that these Northerners are sending from the mines to San Francisco, and shipping East to use for buying arms to kill Confederate soldiers. We're going to take it for the Confederate States of America."

He lowered his voice—the trick of the born orator.

"We're going to war. But where we're riding, there won't be any uniforms nor any flag. . . . We're bushwhackers and the man that gets captured by the enemy is going to be hung. But we're fighting for the same cause as the men who died at Shiloh and Gettysburg, just remember that." He thrust his head forward; his voice rang out sharply. "Get yo' hosses and mount up."

WHEN Dion had started from the valley before daylight that morning with the vaquero, he had known that his errand was dangerous. He was wearing the clothes which he had worn in the days before he had gone to San Francisco, when he rode out into the hills, and there were few chances of anyone who knew the young lawyer recognizing him in this garb. There were not many in this little band who had ever seen him, and he was four years older. But although the risk of recognition was slight, the consequences were large. When Dion had left the house of the stage-robber, it was with the full knowledge that the danger was increasing. And now that he was here, the feeling had come over him that peril was very close to him.

All of this he had foreseen. And he had undertaken it willingly. But so far the risk had been to no purpose.

The line broke up. The men were going to the horses. Dion rose to his feet, but the vaquero pulled him back.

"Easy," he whispered. "Yo' are out of luck if some one sees you now."

Across the open space upon the opposite hillside Sam Anderson spoke under his breath from the shadow of the huge redwood, and John Lacy shaded his eyes with his hand in time to see the lawyer before the latter sank back behind the clump of brush. A moment later Lacy was slipping between the brown trunks, keeping to the shadows with the stealth of a stalking Indian.

The members of the company were busy with their horses; some of them were already swinging into the saddles.

Pete said, "I will slip down to that end and try to find Tom. You watch here, Dion." He stole away on hands and knees and the shadows swallowed him.

Dion lay behind the clump of huckleberry brush. His eyes were fixed on the little crowd at the lower end of the opening. One after another their figures showed, rising above the ruck of men and horses as they settled themselves into the saddles. Then he saw Tom.

A slim young figure and the wide-brimmed hat was slouched down over one ear. There was a brace of pistols in his belt, but the youthful face owned a gentleness which did not harmonize with the weapons. It was the face of a boy who might have been a poet.

Dion was about to rise, when he heard brush crack sharply somewhere behind him. As he turned his head, John Lacy swung his huge fist, and the blow would have felled a bull.

CHAPTER V

IN the distance the sound of hoofs was diminishing. The firelight leaped upward, throwing shafts of brightness among the brown tree trunks; it subsided and the shadows crept back again.

Sam Anderson stood in the pool of darkness beside the redwood tree, staring across the open space. He saw the bearded giant looking down upon the still form at his feet. Anderson was thinking of several things: of the morning when he had loaned Dion the span of thoroughbreds and the buggy which should have gone to pieces; of the fear that had come to him when the young lawyer returned to town unharmed and thanked him for his kindness; of the dread that he had felt a hundred other times before that, lest some accident reveal his connection with Steele's wild project; of the ugly thing that he had witnessed a few minutes ago.

It was many years later that the saying *Safety First* became a slogan; but Sam Anderson had always observed it as a rule of conduct. He was pretty certain of what was to follow soon. He had a picture of the furor which the news of Dion's disappearance would bring. It was inevitable that the news would result in an intensive search; and it was inevitable that suspicion would be directed toward this spot where he was standing now. For within a few days there were to be wild doings in California, and men would trace them back to the grove in the cañon behind John Lacy's house.

The span of horses which he had driven from the valley was hitched at the rack before Lacy's barn. When his thoughts had traveled that far, Sam Anderson left the shadow of the redwood tree and stole along the hillside to the narrow road winding down the cañon. He was spent and breathless when he staggered to the hitching-rack before the barn; a few moments later the wheels of the light buggy were rattling down the road which led through Fiddletown to the distant valley flats.

AS Pete Rodriguez gained a point on the hillside overlooking the lower end of the park among the redwood trees, most of Steele's company were in the saddle. Some of these riders were already out of sight, following their leader down the narrow cañon road. They were riding in double file. The firelight glowed upon them, the smooth faces of boys who were hardly out of their 'teens, the bearded faces of middle-aged men; some were laughing and their voices rose, exultant, as they called to one another.

Among them Pete saw Tom Morgan.

"Well," the vaquero told himself, "he's here. What's Dion going to do now?"

He crept back along the hillside, keeping to the cover of the huckleberry thickets, hugging the deeper shadows, for he had not forgotten the glimpse that he had gotten of John Lacy, and the warning which the stage-robber had given him was fresh in his mind. So it took him some minutes to regain the shelter where he had left Dion. But there was no one here now. Pete searched for some sign which might tell what had happened, but the light of the fire was dying and he found nothing. He rose to his feet.

"Chances are," the vaquero was thinking, "Dion saw Tom. He could have done it. And if he did, why he's going to get his hoss. He'd figure on riding after that bunch; he'd follow them and wait for a chance to talk with Tom."

He and Dion had left the saddle-horses behind a ridge a quarter of a mile away and they had stolen down to the cañon on foot. He started toward the place on a dog-trot.

WHILE Pete crept to the place where he had left Dion, John Lacy was striding through the park. He was carrying Dion's senseless form in his arms. So he and Pete had passed within fifty feet of each other, and neither had suspected the other's presence. The giant went on down the road which followed the windings of the cañon. It was black dark and there were many pitfalls, but he knew the ground, every inch of it, as well as he knew his own backyard. And the burden which he carried in his arms was as slight to his great strength as if Dion had been a child.

Lacy's lips were moving. The words that fell from them were softly spoken; it was as if he were addressing someone who was very close to him. If there had been anyone near by to overhear, that one would have found himself listening to a man who was talking to his God as he walked through the darkness.

He came out of the narrow mouth of the cañon. By contrast to the gloom which he had left, the starlight seemed greater than it was. He saw the cliffs on either side; he saw several live oaks growing beneath them, and upon the summit a huge gnarled tree. His eyes lingered upon a branch that reached outward from the thick trunk; it was like the arm of an old-fashioned gallows. Lacy said somberly:

"The Lord has shown me the way."

But when he went on into the bleak house of redwood shakes, his lips had lost some of their inflexibility. For he was a kind man; he was so gentle that he had been known to lower his rifle muzzle when he had the sights lined on a feeding deer, and to depart without the meat which his family needed. He kicked the door shut behind him, and laid Dion on the table of hewn boards. He stood there for some moments regarding him; then he dropped on his knees and prayed. . . .

When Dion returned to consciousness, his first sensation was the weight of a great giddiness which held him down, and after that he heard a deep voice. The voice died to a mutter that was barely audible, it broke into low sobbing, it

rose in a wail of frenzied invocation. But the giddiness which remained upon Dion was still overpowering and the words came in blurred confusion to his ears. Lacy's voice ceased; it was followed by the sound of a heavy footfall and the banging of the door.

Dion might have swooned again; he did not know, and he had no idea of time's passage. He was lying on his back and his head was aching terribly; his hands were bound behind him and his feet were tied; the light of a candle was shining in his eyes and it was like the stabbing of sharp knives. He shut his eyes against the torture of the light.

The front door swung open. Dion felt a gush of cool air upon his face, the door banged shut and Lacy's face appeared above him. There were beads of perspiration standing out on the furrowed brow; the bearded lips were parted and his breath came heavily. He stood there, frowning down upon his prisoner and his deep-set eyes were glowing like red coals.

"If yo' have anything to say befo' yo' die, yo' can say it now." His voice had a ring in it that was like the resonance of an iron bar which has been struck by a heavy hammer. He had reached the complete lack of mercy, the cold relentlessness which only a kind man can attain, who has turned his back on human feelings in order that he may serve a cause which he believes to be just.

He undid the knots which bound Dion's ankles; he lifted the young lawyer and placed him in a chair.

"The time is getting short," he said. "Yo'r hour has come."

In that moment while Dion was trying to moisten his lips with his dry tongue, there came upon him a curious sense of unreality. It was as if this were happening to someone else, and as if he were only a bystander looking on. The danger that overhung him did not seem to be present now. A man was going to die and that man had failed to carry out a promise which he had made. And a boy was riding away on a wild errand which would bring him to a cell hewn from the living rock on an island in San Francisco bay, or perhaps he would climb the gallows steps. A girl was waiting in a white house at the top of a hill; she was never going to know why the man had failed to keep his word. These things passed through his mind, but the dizziness was like a pair of strong hands which held him down. It was as if, no matter how hard his thoughts struggled, they could not rise above that. And when he spoke at last, the question which he asked seemed to him to be idle, born of mere curiosity:

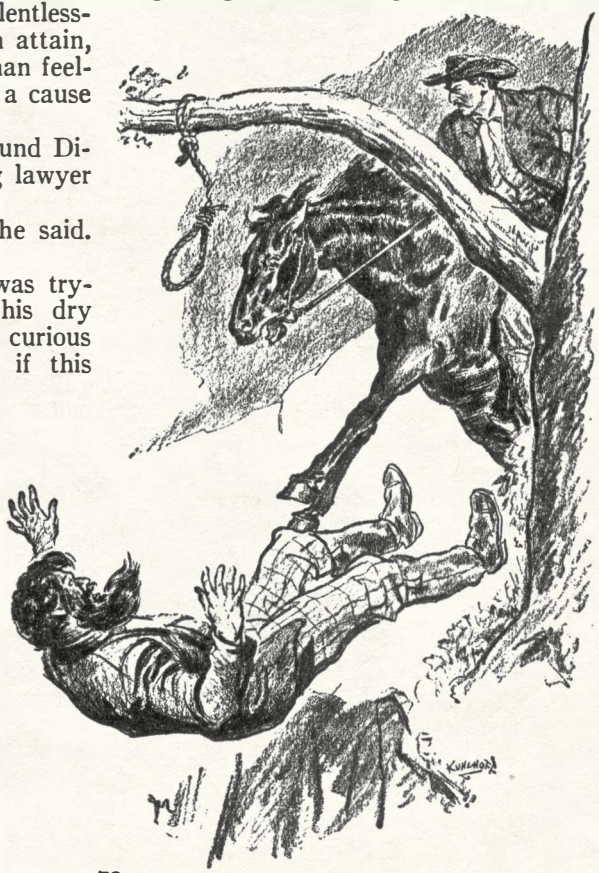
"How are you going to kill me?"

"I'm going to hang yo'," Lacy said.

"Why do you do that?"

And the bearded man answered: "Yo' are a spy."

Dion's head was clearing a little. The purpose which had brought him was beginning to make its presence felt.



The horseman burst out of the night; Lacy was springing to one side when the animal swept down upon him.

"A spy has the right to a trial," Dion answered.

Lacy's face grew harder.

"Yo' was caught right in the act. The Lord delivered yo' into my hands." He reached his great hands forth across the table as if he were about to grasp the prisoner by the throat.

"I came here to find a friend." Dion was talking more firmly now. "I wanted to have a word with him; I wanted to persuade him against going on this expedition."

He was thinking more clearly; he was telling himself that he must keep on talking, that perhaps, if he managed to use up enough time, help might come to him yet. He was wondering where Pete Rodriguez had gone. Then his heart sank, for Lacy had risen from his chair. His somber eyes were fixed on Dion's face. He said:

"Yo' are a Yankee. Yo' are with the enemy and yo' have said as much." He drew a long-bladed bowie knife from the sheath at his waistband and came around the table. He went on speaking.

"I aim to hang yo' for a spy. But if yo' make a move to escape, I'll cut yo'r throat like I would stick a hog. Get up." And when Dion had risen, Lacy nodded toward the door: "Get going."

THE cool air outside was like a benediction. Dion saw the Great Dipper hanging low above the blackness of the hills and he knew that it was long after midnight. A restless rooster started crowing as they went through the barnyard, and fell asleep before he finished. After they had passed through the bars beyond the outbuildings, Lacy growled:

"Take the trail that leads off to the right."

It was a narrow path and it mounted the flank of the hill so abruptly that the climbing was hard for an able-bodied man. Dion's bound hands hampered his movements and his head was still swimming. The shadow of the hill enveloped them and he stumbled blindly.

"Watch yo'r step." The big man's voice was ugly, but Dion did not know that the anger was that of a man who is steeling himself for an act which he does not fancy.

They gained the summit of the rise and they were standing on a little open space, a bit of benchland which stretched before them to the edge of the sandstone cliff. Then Dion saw the oak tree and the branch that reached out over the brink of the bluff; he saw a rope tied to the branch and the noose at the rope's end. He was walking toward the spot as a man walks when he is in a dream, and had halted at Lacy's bidding before his eyes fell on an open grave with the mound of fresh earth beside it. Then he knew where Lacy had gone, and the task which had brought the beads of sweat to the giant's brow during the interval while Dion had lain bound on the table.

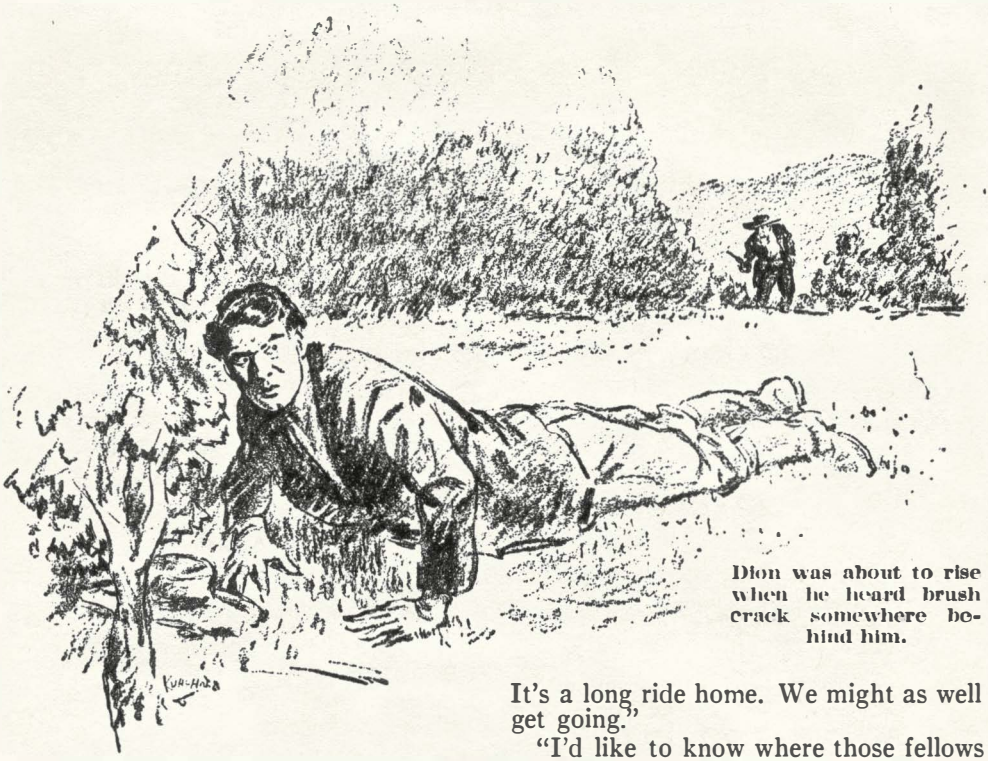
Lacy was standing before him, and the naked knife was in his hand. He spoke, and Dion was sensible of a change which had come into his voice.

"When I fetched yo' to the house, I prayed, and after I finished with my work here, I got down on my knees and I prayed the Lord again. It was the same both times. When I got up I knew jest what I had to do. The Lord made it plain to me."

It was as if he were trying to explain the matter to one who did not understand. As if, in this moment which was to be their final one together, he had cast aside the sternness of self-justification, and was speaking to this prisoner whom he was about to slay, as man to man. And because of that Dion was sure that all hope had gone. He glanced at the cliff; the brink was within a few feet of the spot where he stood; his feet were free; the bluff was not more than twenty yards in height and he remembered the bunch of live oaks at its foot. There was a chance that the branches would break his fall. He was flexing his knees to make the leap when Lacy's heavy hand fell on his shoulder, spun him around and flung him on his back. He lay with the breath shaken from his body. Lacy was standing a few feet away. His back was toward the edge of the cliff; the limb of the live oak and the noose that dangled from it stood out behind him in sharp relief against the stars. He was standing wide-footed, his head bent forward—when a sound of hoofs came from the hillside which sloped to the benchland.

WHEN Dion first heard the hoofbeats, he tried to rise. The interval between that time and the final climax was so slight that he was still struggling to gain his feet—and Lacy had barely raised his head—when the horseman burst out of the night. The giant hesitated an instant, then was springing to one side when the animal swept down upon him.

A brief thunder of racing hoofs; a cloud of dust arose into the starlight.



Dion was about to rise when he heard brush crack somewhere behind him.

The crash of breaking branches somewhere below; the dust was thinning now. The horse was backing away from the brink of the bluff; the rider was leaning back in his saddle.

Dion got to his feet then.

"That's riding, Pete," he said.

"He's a good hoss. I learned him the trick, breasting cattle in the chutes." There was just a hint of complacency in the vaquero's voice. He swung from the saddle and the horse shifted to get better footing; it began mouthing the Spanish bit.

"So," Pete was getting out his knife, "that's how it is." He cut the rope which bound Dion's wrists. He stepped to the edge of the cliff and looked over. "I don' think he goes to church in Fiddletown for a few Sundays," he announced quietly. He turned around. "How did he get you, Dion?"

"All I know is someone hit me," Dion told him. "There's a lump on my jaw that feels as big as a hen's egg. When I came to my senses he had me tied up in his house."

"I was looking for you this last two hours," Pete said. "I figured yo' was following those bushwhackers, but when I found both hosses where we left 'em, I knew it must be Lacy. So I came back here."

"I saw Tom," Dion announced.

"I saw him too." Pete's voice was not enthusiastic. "Your hoss is on the hill. It's a long ride home. We might as well get going."

"I'd like to know where those fellows are heading for," Dion said.

"Figure it out," Pete bade him. "They struck off east, across the hills. That means the San Joaquin. You heard Steele talk. There's only one place they're making big treasure shipments now and that's the Placerville road. You cross the San Joaquin to get there."

"My head," Dion told him, "isn't working very well just now. But I know what we're going to do. You're riding home. I'm riding after Tom."

"You're crazy," Pete announced dispassionately. "You were crazy before. That clout Lacy gave you made you worse."

"Maybe you're right." Dion laughed mirthlessly. "But I'm going just the same."

"Me too," Pete said.

"I've got a plan," Dion went on. He outlined it in a dozen words, and when he finished the vaquero swore softly.

"If you want to commit suicide, you can do it quicker with that rope Lacy fixed up for you," he commented.

"I'll take my chances," Dion said. "You've forgotten that I've been away four years. When Irene saw me she said I'd changed, and you had to look at me twice before you knew me. It's not so likely anyone will recognize me. No, I'm going. And you're staying in the valley. There's something for you to do down there. If you've forgotten that singletree, I haven't. I've been looking up a

few things about Anderson—and you've got to tend to that end while I'm away."

It was nearly daylight before he finished outlining the vaquero's duties and rode off across the ridge alone.

CHAPTER VI

IT was getting on toward evening and the day had been hot. The heat still lingered up here in the American River cañon and the dust was deep on the Placerville road. No sooner had one cloud subsided than another rose, to subside in its turn and settle on the foliage of the tall pines, on the chaparral, on the carpet of pine needles. For a good two hundred yards on either side of the highway which wound across the Sierras to the mines of the Comstock Lode, every branch and little twig and leaf was coated with a gray film; the harsh dry smell of the dust was always in the air.

The river growled among the rocks below. The growling filled the cañon from one steep tree-clad flank to the other; but within this space where the dust lay there were frequent intervals when the sullen voice of the stream was drowned by more abrupt sounds: the rattle of running gear, the rasping scream of locked wheels dragging down the hard roadway, the *crack-crack* of long-lashed whips. Two processions swept past, one line climbing upward, the other rushing down to the west: men on horseback, pack-trains, twenty-mule teams hauling wide-tired wagons and trailers heaped high with cargoes of all descriptions. The drivers sat on their lofty seats, swaying to the jolting of the huge vehicles. They were masked to the eyes with handkerchiefs like highwaymen, and the dust had painted them from head to foot. Their voices penetrated the clamor in brief fervid outbursts of profanity.

Half a mile up the mountainside there was no dust. The noises of the men and teams were inaudible. The forest held no sign of the disorderly commerce which was surging back and forth between the seaboard and Nevada's bonanza mines. The voice of the river came faint with distance; it was no louder than the droning of the breeze which was beginning to filter through the pines with the approach of evening. The air was perfumed with resin, with the pungent aroma of the chaparral, and the more penetrating odor of bear clover. There was a little flat here, a patch of tableland.

The horses were saddled and they had been fed; they were ready for the evening's work. They were standing in the lengthening shadows of the pines, and Tom Morgan could hear them stamping flies; he could hear the jingling of the bridle-chains and the mouthing of bits. The sounds increased his own restlessness. He looked down the slope, through aisles of yellow and gray tree trunks, and his eyes were glowing.

His wide-brimmed hat was on one side, slouched down over his ear. He had arranged it thus with care,—he was always meticulous about that droop of the rim, to see that it was exactly like that of John Steele's hat. His shirt was open at the throat; he was wearing two big pistols in his belt and his tight trousers were tucked into the tops of his dragoon boots, for this was the manner of Steele's dressing. But it would need a long time and the hardening disillusionment of shedding other men's blood to harmonize his face with that of the red-haired captain whom he had come to worship.

The lashes that drooped before his eyes were long, and the eyes were soft, despite the light of restlessness that flared within them; his lips were curving like a girl's. He was dreaming dreams, he was seeing visions. Visions of wild riding and fast action, of swift flight and of pistols spitting fire. Visions of looted treasure and of a triumphant return to Fiddletown. There was a curious thing about these pictures which were passing before his mind. It had been always the same, during the days at home in the valley and the nights when he rode out into the hills, during the journey across the San Joaquin and the interval which had followed while they awaited the great moment of the raid. There was a sort of golden haze that hung over the pictures and it always hid certain details, such as blood creeping from wounds and the graying faces of dying men.

OTHERS of the company were scattered about in pairs and in little groups; some of them were sprawling on their backs in the dark green bear clover whose stiff little twigs gave off a pungent witch-hazel smell. Tom Morgan was to remember that odor years afterward, and whenever the memory recurred, it was to bring with it a shudder of dread.

John Wesley Wade and Weaver Goodnight were squatting like a pair of Turks, playing mumble-peg with a big bowie

knife; Hampton Waugh was kneeling behind a huge log, hiding a quart bottle under the pine needles. Some of the men were gathered around one of their number who had got hold of a Sacramento paper; they were arguing over Lee's chances against Grant in the distant Wilderness. John Steele and Tom Poole conferred by a big sugar pine. Their eyes went to young Morgan.

"I figured that you had it fixed," Poole was saying, "but I always had an idee you'd greased some fellow's palm." He was a huge man, this one-time Sheriff of Monterey County, who had hanged a prisoner against the governor's reprieve because his constituents didn't like the culprit; a hairy man with a mass of black beard which always kept sprouting as fast as he sheared it back.

"NOBODY got a dollar," Steele told him. "It was Anderson that did it." Poole whistled between his teeth and Steele nodded as he went on, "All he asked was fo' me to recruit this boy an' to make a raider out of him. He was so afeard I wouldn't keep my bargain that he came to the grove the night we rode away, jest to make certain Tom was agoin'." He laughed quietly. "The curious thing about it is that Tom was plumb anxious anyhow. He'd come to me before I ever laid eyes on Anderson and I didn't lift a finger to enlist him."

"It's the first time any man got something from Sam Anderson for nothing," Poole declared. He scrubbed his fingers through his rough beard. "Now I wonder what was he after?"

"I aint botherin' my haid about that," Steele said. "He's left Fiddletown alone so far, like he done promised, but if the boy was to quit us I've got an idea that Anderson would make us plenty of trouble. So I am fretting."

"I know," Poole nodded. "I've seen these kids in the Mexican War. Ontel they've smelled a lot of powder-smoke, they're jest as liable to run one way as the other."

"An' bushwhackin' aint soldiering," Steele reminded him. "The' aint the fifes an' drums an' flags to fire 'em up. And I've got to fetch this kid back to Fiddletown as a case-hardened raider."

"Shove him right into this first hold-up," Poole said. "Same way yo' throw a kid into the water to teach him to swim. That's my advice."

"I reckon I'll keep him pretty close beside me," Steele announced, "where I can hold an eye on him. I'm sendin' Billy Stout up the road after supper. He can spot the stage when they're changin' hosses at Fifteen-mile House. It's a two-mile ride down to where we'll be waitin', an' Billy can make it in plenty of time if he crowds his hoss. When he fetches the word, yo'll listen for the stage, an' when yo' hear 'em comin', yo'll ride out into the middle of the road on the upgrade side of that hairpin turn. Take two men with yo'; I'll give yo' yo'r pick of the company. If the driver don't pull up, shoot the two lead hosses. Soon as they've come to a stop, I'll fetch the rest of the boys right down an' we'll take care of things."

Poole chuckled. "Aint been a good stage-robbery since last summer, when they lynched that road-agent that hadn't any name—leastways nobody knew what his was. He used to wear kid gloves, and once he served the passengers champagne while he was taking their money."

"This heah," Steele declared, "aint a stage-robbery. We aint taking anything from the passengers. It's Wells Fargo treasure. And what we get, I will receipt fo' in the name of the Confederate States of America."

He drew himself up stiffly and Poole shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Call it a raid," he said. "Maybe that sounds nicer. But I bet Wells Fargo call it robbery when they report it to the Sheriff. And I bet they offer a reward for every man in our gang, same as if we was road-agents."

John Steele nodded, and when he spoke it was in an undertone.

"Yo' an' I know that. Back in Missouri I have seen my name on handbills with a price on it. But we don't say anything about it to the young fellows. Leave 'em to learn it fo' themselves when the time comes."

THE light was beginning to wane between the trees; twilight came on. A fire blazed in the middle of the little tableland and the fragrance of coffee rose into the dusk; the members of the company gathered around the blaze and ate their supper. Then Billy Stout swung into the saddle and rode away into the gathering night.

One of the men left the circle of firelight shortly afterward. It was Hampton Waugh. He went to the big log where he had hidden that bottle and scraped away the pine needles. He remained there until the rest of the com-

pany were mounting their horses. When he rejoined the others his face was flaming, his eyes were glazed.

John Steele beckoned to Tom Morgan. The boy came to his side like an eager dog. Steele said:

"I want you to stick close by me." He saw the young face flush with sudden pride.

A few moments later they were in the saddle, riding down the hill; Steele in the lead, Tom Morgan behind him.

The shadows closed in behind them. The hill was steep; the men leaned back against the cantles of their saddles. The noise of the river grew louder, but the road below them was silent now, for most of the freight-wagons had reached Placerville; the others were drawn up for the night at the roadhouses which stood beside the highway a few miles apart. There was a thicket of young pines above the summit of the upper back at the sharp turn which Steele had described to Tom Poole that afternoon. The men halted behind this.

"Stay in the saddle, all of yo'," Steele bade them. "Nobody starts his hoss until I give the word. Then Tom Poole takes his two men down into the road. The rest wait here. I'll tell yo' when yo'r turn comes."

An empty wagon was rattling down the grade. The sound grew louder; it passed below the bank and they heard the driver cursing his horses. The noise of the wheels subsided and the voices of the cañon mingled without interruption: the dull roaring of the river, the droning of the evening breeze in the pine branches overhead, the mysterious rustlings which always accompany the darkness out of doors. Occasionally one of the men spoke to his neighbor in an undertone, and once a horse shook itself with a rattle of trappings which seemed very loud.

STEELE had dismounted and was standing in a narrow space where the saplings parted, giving an aisle which led down to the summit of the bank. He was gazing up the winding road when the swift *rat-tat-tat* of a speeding horse made him stiffen.

"Comin' on the daid run," Steele muttered, and the voice of Tom Poole replied from the thicket:

"We're ready when you say the word."

The horseman emerged out of the night, a shadow speeding down the gray road between the black walls of trees which seemed to touch the stars. To the eyes of the watcher, grown accustomed to the darkness now, the shadow assumed distinctness. Steele was stepping forward, his arm was uplifted. Suddenly the arm dropped to his side and he sprang back into the thicket. The horseman swept on by, leaning forward in the saddle; his limp hat-brim was upturned above his brow. Then he was gone.

"The telegraph line's broke down again and they're sending riders across from Carson City," Steele announced quietly. A man swore somewhere under his breath and young Tom Morgan clenched his teeth to stop their rattling. He was shaking from head to foot. He could not stop that jerking of his limbs. He wanted to flee, he wanted to spur his horse down the bank and ride up the winding road to meet that stage alone. Run or fight, it did not matter which, but there was one thing which seemed impossible: that was to wait.

BUT when he heard Stout's horse a few minutes later, he was quiet, listening to the pounding of hoofs as it came nearer, listening to Steele's voice and the voice of the rider as the hoofs scraped to an abrupt stop.

"Coming, Billy?"

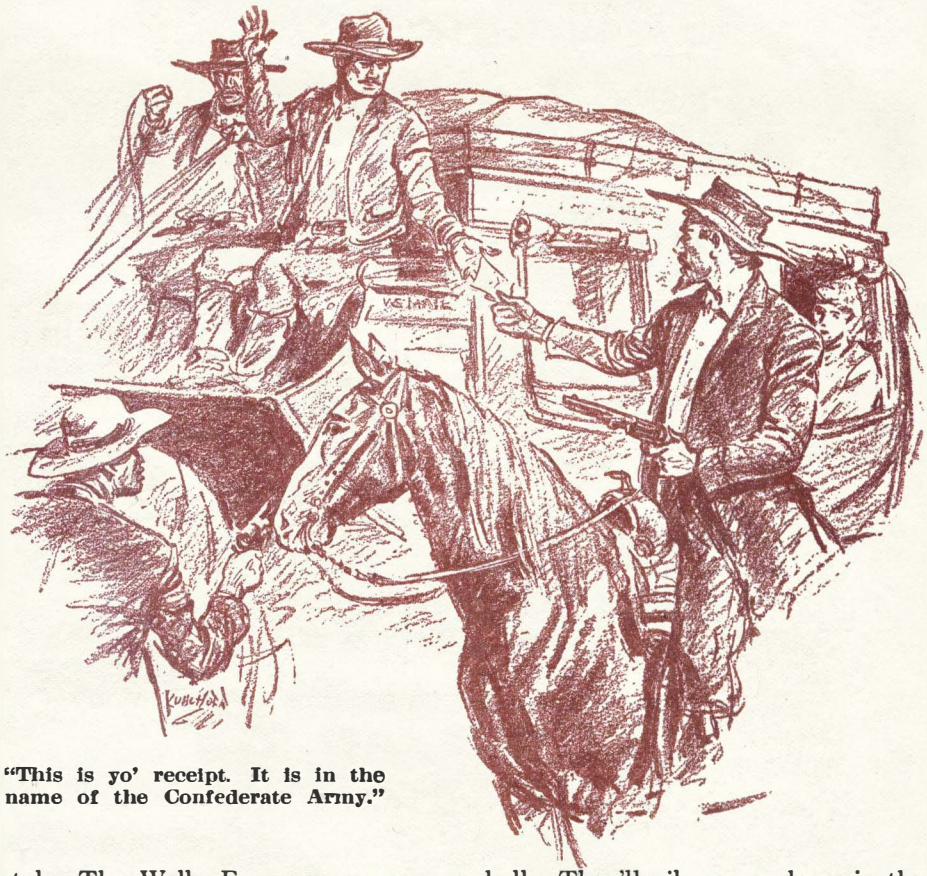
"They done left the Fifteen-mile House before I saw 'em. They're makin' time."

"Get off the road, Billy. Now, Poole."

Tom Poole and his two riders slid their horses down the steep bank. They pulled up, barring the road. There was a brief interval of silence and then the waiting men heard the Virginia City stage. Six horses; the leaders were loping free; the swing and wheel spans were trotting like racers at a county fair; the beating of their hoofs was in perfect double rhythm, and as it grew louder there came the undernote of jingling harness, the rattle of heavy wheels.

Tom Poole and his two riders were drawn up now, barring the road where it came into the hairpin turn. The men were as motionless as statues, the animals dancing lightly to the taut reins. One reared and came down. And after that the three mounts were still.

There was a straight stretch where the road approached the hairpin turn and the bank on the lower side was so abrupt that the crowns of the pines were not so lofty here; the starlight was brighter. As the stage came down the grade into this open place, the driver was leaning far back, his heels braced against the foot rail; the reins were as taut as strips



"This is yo' receipt. It is in the name of the Confederate Army."

of metal. The Wells Fargo messenger was sitting beside him, smoking a cigar. The wheel horses were gathering their hind legs under their bodies, settling back against the neck-yokes; one of the swing span had leaped astride a tug and it was kicking violently; the leaders had slackened to a trot. Then there was a sudden confusion of noises: the shrieking of brake-shoes on iron tires, the scraping of tires on the roadway, the rattle of harness and the confused thudding of hoofs. Through it all, the voice of the driver rose, soothing his animals. They eased to a halt. The driver's voice rose:

"What in the—"

The voice of Tom Poole cut him off.

"Stand! Or we shoot. You there! Don't tech that shotgun."

The Wells Fargo messenger straightened up abruptly.

Steele said: "Now, boys!" The rest of the band followed him in double file. The rattle of rocks ceased when the last rider reached the foot of the bank and deployed into the road. They spurred up the road and ranged themselves on either side of the stage. The driver saw the pistols in their hands. He said:

"All right. Come and get it." And then he added: "You folks inside there, keep your hair on. If anybody starts shooting, these leaders will break as sure as hell. They'll pile us up down in the river two hundred feet below."

A girl within the coach cried: "Why, it's a hold-up!"

Steele said: "No ma'am. This is not robbery. We will not harm yo'. We are Southern gentlemen."

He had drawn up his horse beside the open window where her face showed. He was sitting erect in the saddle, one hand clasping the reins, the other holding his leveled six-shooter. His head was back, his eyes glowing. Tom had reined up beside him, with long-barreled pistol in hand. The boy's eyes were fixed proudly upon his leader.

"If you are gentlemen, why the pistols?" The girl was facing the window, her eyes bright with excitement.

"We are not seekin' yo'r money," Steele said loudly. "We are after the bullion from Virginia City." And as if in confirmation of his words, the dull thud of a treasure-sack falling into the roadway followed. Tom Morgan heard Poole growling a sharp order to the driver, and then the sound was repeated.

"We are," Steele went on and his manner was just a bit theatrical, "a company of bushwhackers. We're enlisted in the Confederate Army, ma'am."

The thud of a third sack sounded, and Poole demanded: "That's all?"

"That's all," the driver said.

"Keep these folks covered, Tom," Steele bade the boy beside him, and thrust his own pistol into its holster. He pulled a notebook and pencil from his pocket; he held the book upon the saddle-horn, and he was busy for some moments writing. After he had finished, he touched his horse with the spur and halted alongside the driver; he handed the paper up to him.

"This," he stated politely, "is yo' receipt. It is in the name of the Confederate Army. I have the hono' to hold a captain's commission."

All of this time Tom Morgan's eyes were on the girl. And because there was no fear in her face, he was still proud. For this was the thing of which he had been dreaming: the ride through the forest; the wait; the sharp encounter; the drawn weapons; the treasure which was to be used for the cause which he had cherished. The face of that girl gave the final touch to the whole picture. It was while he was gazing at her across the barrel of his leveled pistol, while his pride was still hot within him, that Hampton Waugh fired.

The noise of the shot made Tom look around. He saw the driver pitching from his seat. He saw the Wells Fargo guard leaning down beside him to snatch the reins. The six horses were surging into their collars. The stage swept by, and Tom had a final glimpse of the girl's face against the window as it flashed past him. There was no color in her cheeks now. Her eyes were wide with fear. For just an instant they met his eyes, and he saw the loathing that had come into them.

The stage was gone; the tumult of wheels and hoofs and jangling harness was growing fainter. Several men were off their horses looking down upon a body, and Tom was staring at the dark stain of blood which was spreading over the gray face.

CHAPTER VII

A DROWSY Indian took Dion's jaded horse at Mission San Jose. He said:

"Twelve men, señor, and there was one with a beard as red as fire. They rode away this morning on the Niles Cañon road."

At the mouth of Niles Cañon there was a red brick tavern with a watering-trough in front of it, beneath one of the largest sycamores Dion had ever seen. A crop-haired man, whose accent smacked suspiciously of Australia, suggesting a ticket-of-leave and convict-camps, furnished a fresh horse and remembered a dozen riders who had passed through a few hours before. But when Dion was riding up the winding cañon between the tawny hills of the coast range, the new animal went lame, and by the time he came down the eastern slope into the fervid San Joaquin valley, the few hours' lead which the bushwhackers had held, was more than doubled.

The valley flats were like an enormous oven, and the Mexican corral boss who made the change of horses at Tracy's ranch, shook his head dubiously.

"E'es hot now two days," he told his customer. "When yo' make the river the snow water is come down from the Sierra. These ones yo' try to catch, they are crossed now."

THE prophecy was more than justified. The San Joaquin was running half a mile wide, hiding the tops of the willows on the bars, when Dion reached it. He waited two days for the crippled ferry to resume, then took his life and the life of his horse in his hands and spurred the animal into the ice-cold stream. . . .

In Stockton he picked up the trail again. It was like following a city street, so far as signs were concerned. He met news of Steele's riders at every stopping place. But the last tidings came at Somerset House. It was one of those foothill taverns which had flourished during the recent years of the placer mines when every gulch was yielding gold nuggets by the hundredweight—a long two-story stone building with a veranda running from end to end. The boisterous Forty-niners had departed. Only a few Chinese remained to comb down the old dumps, and the place subsisted from the custom of freighters who were hauling supplies to quartz mines along the Mother Lode. In the deserted barroom the clinging smell of liquor which had been spilled long ago, remained as a reminder of the good times that had passed. An impassive Chinaman whose queue was curled in a huge wad, making him look top-heavy, served Dion breakfast consisting of leathery ham, dubious eggs, and something which he called coffee.

"Him come," the Chinese told his guest, "fo' days ago. Him go." He pointed out the road by which the bushwhackers had departed. It was a dusty

road and narrow; it wound along the folded hillsides where the grass was brown and the chaparral crackled under the sun's heat. And after Dion had followed it for a few miles, it forked. He debated briefly and took the branch which led to Placerville. There he got no further word of the men whom he was seeking.

That day was the hottest which he had ever known; it was, so the bearded old timers who sat in the dimness of barrooms said, the hottest in the town's history which went back for fifteen years. Dion walked the length of the crooked main street, where red-shirted Forty-niners had surged from bar to bar, and from gambling-house to gambling-house less than ten years before; where the teamsters and the stage-drivers and the travelers from the Comstock lode were spending their money, less freely than the men of the placer diggings but more consistently. He passed a thriving oak tree near the street's upper end; its leaves were gray with dust and he looked upon the limb from which nooses had dangled in the fervid days when the raw camp was christened Hangtown. It made him remember another limb where he had seen a single noose a week ago. All day long he combed down saloons, hotels, and livery-stables, but no one had news of twelve riders whose leader was a young fellow with red hair and a fiery wisp of beard.

EVENING came, but with little surcease as yet from the heat. Dion was talking with the proprietor of the livery-stable where he had put up his horse. They were standing in the wide doorway which fronted the winding main street. Lamps were burning in store windows; pathways of yellow light streaked the darkness before the doors of saloons and gambling houses. The front of the California Theater was radiant, halfway down the block, and a brass band was playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Men in beaver hats and frock coats and women in billowing crinolines were passing on their way to the play, which was a Civil War drama; other men in flapping, wide-brimmed hats and red shirts were sitting on the edge of the board sidewalk.

"You've been to Somerset House?" Dion asked.

The liveryman was peeling thin shavings from a pine shingle. He was ruminating on a large cud of chewing tobacco. For a moment he ceased both operations, then spat, and after that he nodded. The band down the street stopped playing. The bass drummer gave three resounding thumps and the brasses started on the opening bars of "Yankee Doodle." The *rat-tat-tat* of hoofs became audible. It grew louder. It grew louder; the rider was approaching from up the cañon; his horse was running free. He was a little man; as he leaned forward on his pancake saddle, the wind of his progress swept back the limp brim of his felt hat. He drew up abruptly in front of the stable and leaped from the horse. A hostler was holding a fresh animal and the rider seized the reins. In the brief interval before he mounted a small crowd had gathered and a voice cried:

"How about Grant?"

"Lost five thousand more men," the rider announced, and swung into the saddle. He was off before the words had fairly left his lips.

DION felt a sense of premonition. For just a moment he was wondering whether this slaughter in the Wilderness might not be the beginning of the end, and whether that end might not be a Confederate victory after all. And he was thinking that perhaps his cause was the lost cause. Perhaps those twelve men who had vanished as if in thin air, were going to set California aflame as John Steele had prophesied that night in the redwoods. Then he set his jaw and dismissed his forebodings. And the brisk notes of "Yankee Doodle" floated up the street.

"This side of Somerset House," Dion said, "the road forks, and the left-hand branch leads to Placerville."

The liveryman nodded again and once more he spat. He murmured:

"C'rect, pardner." And he stroked his unshaven chin.

"And the right-hand fork—where?" Dion asked.

"That there," the liveryman replied after a few moments' silent mastication, "is a short cut. It takes off acrost the ridge an' it jines the road to Virginia City fifteen miles up the American River cañon."

"That being the case," Dion told him, "you can saddle up my horse. I'll be back for him in half an hour or so."

The band was still playing "Yankee Doodle" when he passed the theater. The audience was beginning to enter the wide doors. He heard two men arguing over the chances of Lincoln's election next

fall. A pair of teamsters were in hot dispute as to Grant's chances in the Wilderness campaign, when he entered the restaurant which had introduced the "Hangtown fry" to California's easily pleased gourmands a few years before. He took his seat at one of the smaller tables in a corner of the long room—a dusty figure with nearly a week's beard. His eyes were sunken from lack of sleep; there were fresh lines upon his face. He looked five years older than he had that noontime when he had drawn up Sam Anderson's thoroughbreds in front of the blacksmith shop at the crossroads. He was finishing his meal when the stage rattled by. Through the window he saw a girl's face, and saw horror in her eyes. He was still thinking of that face when he came out on the board sidewalk a few minutes later. Two men were entering as he emerged, and one was saying:

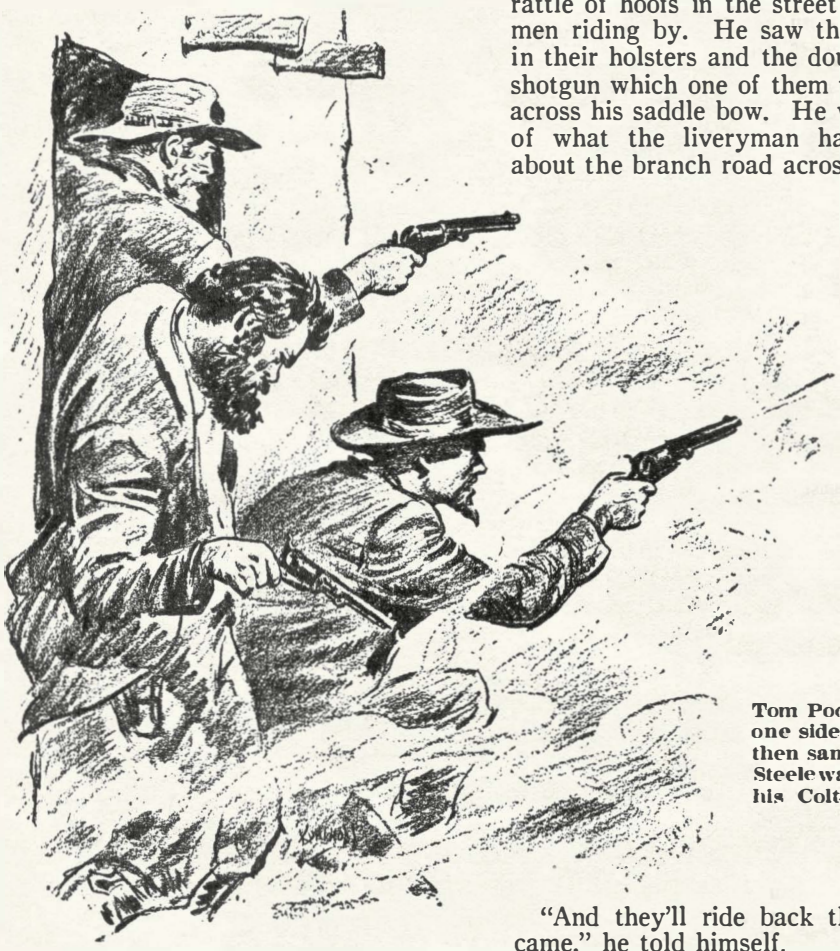
"Yessir. They got three sacks of bullion. And the leader says they wa'n't robbers. He says they're bushwhackers. Whoever they are, they killed the driver."

Dion paused and turned around. He overtook the pair, and he touched the speaker on the shoulder.

"Where was this?" he demanded.

"Just beyond the Thirteen-mile House," the man said. "The Sheriff's getting up a posse now."

It was a little more than two blocks to the livery-stable. Dion had made less than half the distance when he heard the rattle of hoofs in the street and saw six men riding by. He saw the big pistols in their holsters and the double-barreled shotgun which one of them was carrying across his saddle bow. He was thinking of what the liveryman had told him about the branch road across the ridge.



Tom Poole slumped to one side, tried to rise, then sank again. John Steele was on one knee, his Colt spitting fire.

"And they'll ride back the way they came," he told himself.

His horse was saddled and waiting. He paid the liveryman and mounted; he rode out of town at a brisk trot. But when he had passed the lower end of the main street where the road turned off to Somerset House, he spurred the animal to a run.

CHAPTER VIII

YOUNG BILLY STOUT, who used to break horses in the Santa Clara Valley, spurred his mount to the group who were standing around the dead driver. He pulled up alongside Hampton Waugh.

The Sheriff raised his shotgun to his shoulder. . . . One of the riders spurred up, pistol in hand.

"I saw him when you shot," he cried. "His hands were raised. I hope the Sheriff gets you! I hope they hang you!"

John Steele had dismounted, and was bending over the body when the boy spoke. He straightened abruptly, and barely raised his voice; but it held a note which made every member of the company stiffen to attention.

"No more of that! Now men, cut those sacks open. Split up the bullion. Poole, yo' will take the gold from the Wells Fargo box. We're on our way."

Tom Morgan watched them from his horse. He saw young Billy Stout's face, distorted with the same ugly sensations which were racking his own body; he saw Tom Poole's face, and the drops of sweat upon the ex-sheriff's brow were gleaming in the faint light of the stars; he heard the others panting at their work and his eyes went to John Steele. In that moment when his captain had risen to meet the first emergency, as undisturbed as if this tragedy had been some little bickering which he had been called upon to settle among the men, the admiration which had owned the boy during these last three months—the passionate admiration of untried youth for a seasoned hero—had departed, beyond any chance of recovery. It was buried under the gray face of a murdered man, beneath the memory of a girl's loathing. And the fear that had replaced it, shook him like a spasm of physical sickness.

Steele said: "Mount up. We got no time to waste, boys. Where's Tom Mo'gan?" When the boy ranged his horse alongside, Steele gave him a sharp glance. He murmured: "It's fo' the Stars and Bars, Tom. Remember."

Tom's head was bowed; he did not answer. They rode away up the winding highway where mule teams and stage-coaches and express messengers and all the hurried commerce between the seaboard and the East made the forest ring during the long days. It was silent now, save for the dull thudding of the hoofs in the deep dust and the brawling of the river in the depths below. They rode two by two, Tom and the red-bearded captain in the lead. Now and then one of the men behind them cursed in a fervent undertone, for the bars of silver bullion from the Comstock mines were heavy; they were slippery, awkward to hold across the forks of the stock saddles. The grade was steep in spots and they were keeping their horses to the square trot. Once some of those in the rear strove to increase the pace and Steele checked them sharply.

"Easy does it, boys," he reminded them. "Ef yo' crowd yo' hosses now, yo' cain't run 'em later when yo' need the speed."

The trees rose tall on either side; their ranks were like black walls that touched the stars. And when the raiders turned into the byroad which descended into the cañon's depths, the forest drew in still closer, the stars disappeared. Steele was silent now; occasionally he glanced at the boy beside him, but if Tom saw any of those glances he made no sign of it; he held his head bowed, looking straight before him. And, all of this time, his thoughts were roving far behind; his ears were hearkening for the sound of swift hoofbeats.

IN the days now gone forever, the days when patriotism for a doomed cause had swept him like a flame, when he had worshiped this man who was riding within arm's length as only a boy can worship a chosen hero—in those days he had held visions of riding through the foothills by night, visions of riding beside his captain at the head of a company who were carrying loot of gold and silver on their saddle-bows, visions of pursuit and of revolvers flaming. Now the visions had become reality and the reality like a cold wind kept him shivering from head to foot. For the first time realiza-

tion had come to him. This was not the war which he had desired, in which he would have given up his life; he knew the truth now—and he was sick. . . .

They crossed a flimsy bridge, and the noise of the river was deafening; they started up the steep slopes on the other side. The horses were beginning to sweat, for it was still warm, an all-but-breathless night. One of the men dropped his bar of bullion and cursed his companions as they rode on by. Tom Poole drew rein and dismounted and helped him get the bar back upon his saddle. They had been climbing for more than an hour when Steele bade them halt. He called Poole to his side and they conferred in undertones. Then the two of them swung from their saddles and vanished in the forest. The sound of cracking brush came out of the darkness; the horses were breathing heavily. Hampton Waugh swore at his animal and drove in the spurs; it lunged from side to side, striving to surge forward against the taut reins. Young Billy Stout cried, "Stop it!" And one of the older men rode up. He struck Waugh across the face with the back of his hand, and the drunkard began weeping noisily.

Steele and Tom Poole emerged from the forest, and the former said:

"All right, men. We'll bury that bullion."

The two of them took the bars from the horsemen, and because the bars were heavy they made several trips of it. And it came to Tom Morgan then that they dared not trust the others with the secret of the hiding-place.

THEY had lost nearly a half-hour, but the horses were a little fresher for the rest. The remainder of the long grade they made at a square trot. And when they crossed the ridge, when the stars showed, growing fainter with the dawn's approach, they increased the pace to an easy lope.

"We'll make Somerset House a little afte' daylight," Steele said. "We can get a bait fo' ou'selves an' then we shove on. We'll make Fiddletown in two days, boys."

"What about the bullion?" a voice behind him demanded.

"Tom Poole has got the gold from the Wells Fargo box," Steele answered. "We dig up the bullion later."

Some one laughed and the laughter had a nasty ring. Tom Morgan let his horse drop back, and Steele rode alone.

The grade was growing steeper and they reined the horses back to the swinging trot; they had been in the saddle for long hours now, and the animals were growing jaded; this downhill riding was wearisome. The sky behind them was beginning to turn pink; the twilight of the dawn was enwrapping them.

A desire which had been growing during the last two hours began to take possession of Tom Morgan, a desire to drop out of the ranks and to hide himself somewhere in the manzanita brush which grew rank among the trees. To hide until the noise of the hoofs and the jingle of harness had subsided, until the swift rattle of pursuing hoofs had come to his ears and had died away. For he knew that pursuit was coming.

When he had come into this project, it had been with a fixed ideal. And that ideal had been proven false. He had swindled himself. And in the moment when he had discovered this, he had witnessed a murder in which he had no hand. His illusions were gone. But he was no murderer. And he had to escape from that company whose members were riding to the gallows.

And while he was thinking of these things, the dawn arrived. Escape became impossible.

The sun was creeping into sight above the eastern summits when they rode down through the brown foothills dotted with stiff, arid pines and live oaks, and they saw Somerset House beside the dusty wagon track. The coats of the horses were dark with sweat, and streaks of lather stood out white upon their flanks when the men turned the animals into the corral before the tavern. Tom Morgan was one of the first to enter.

He came into the barroom where the smell of stale liquor was always present. The old Chinese with the black blouse and the loose nankeen trousers tied with strings about his ankles, was standing behind the bar. Two customers were before the counter. They were arguing noisily: a bearded teamster from the southern mines and a stranger whose drooping hat-brim hid his eyes. And the latter was saying:

"You can call it what you please. But that's my say-so, Mister. Lee has got him licked, an' in three months from now this butcher Grant won't have any army left. Just mark my words."

"I'll make you swallow them words," the teamster growled. He looked up as the door swung open and the newcomers

surged into the room. He said: "You gents, listen to this Copperhead."

But the young fellow with whom he had been disputing had turned his back and walked away; he took his place behind a table in a corner at the room's rear. And Tom Morgan stood in the doorway staring at him. There was something in that dusty, travel-stained figure which seemed familiar; he could not place it; there was something in the voice that he had heard before. John Steele brushed by him. He bestowed no more than a passing glance on the man before the bar; he went straight to the table where the other had seated himself. And Tom Morgan noticed that Steele was holding one hand close to his pistol holster; he heard Steele saying:

"I've seen yo' somewhere befo', my friend."

CHAPTER IX

SOMETIMES when a man is in a tight place he thinks fast, but just as often his thoughts refuse to center upon the emergency. It was so with Dion when he saw John Steele coming across the barroom. He knew that the man was going to speak to him; he saw the light of suspicious recognition in Steele's eyes. He saw Tom Morgan gazing at him. And his thoughts turned momentarily from his own peril to what he saw written on the boy's face: the sickness of utter disillusionment.

"Tom's got enough of it," Dion told himself. "He's ready to quit right now."

And then Steele was standing before the little table with his hand close to his pistol-butt, and Dion realized that he must answer the bushwhacker's challenge without a sign of hesitation.

If he had been given opportunity for careful consideration, he could not have spoken better. He said:

"It was in the Santa Clara Valley, one day last week. You were riding away from Morgan's house, and I was driving up the hill." He lowered his voice a little. "You ought to remember that span of thoroughbreds. You've seen them before. You know whom they belong to."

It was a chance shot, but it was not a shot in the dark. Dion had been putting two and two together a good many times since the incident of the broken bolt on the singletree. All that he had gathered as yet was a suspicion of Sam Anderson's part in this affair, and of the banker's reasons for it, but he had a feeling that the suspicion was well grounded.

But there were some things which he did not know, and when Steele asked him swiftly, "What fetches yo' here?" Dion's answer was by way of fencing:

"You ought to be able to figure that out for yourself."

"So? That's it?" Steele's face had become unpleasant and his voice had a hard edge. "That banker wouldn't trust his own mother." He scowled across the table and was about to go on with his questioning when Tom Poole came to the door and called him away. Before he left he delivered a word of warning:

"I'm looking after that boy. Don't go near him."

The room was beginning to fill. Several of the bushwhackers were hammering the bar, shouting for the Chinaman, but the old servitor had shuffled away to the kitchen where he was busy preparing the meal for all hands. Steele and Tom Poole were conferring in the doorway and Dion watched them out of the side of his eyes; the Captain's scowl had deepened, he was shaking his head to emphasize his words, but neither man so much as cast a look at the watcher behind the table. Tom had disappeared.

The interval that followed was peaceable enough so far as action was concerned. There were times when the danger that confronted Dion was far more imminent, but none of them held the suspense which these minutes did. The plan which he had made before he left Pete Rodriguez was elastic when it came to details, but he had not foreseen such an emergency as the one with which he was now confronted: The murder of the stage-driver; the riders who had swept by him up Placerville's main street with the Sheriff at their head, bearing a double-barreled shotgun across his saddle-bow. They might be here at any moment now. And he could not move until that pair left the doorway.

IT had been his idea to overtake Steele's men, and somehow or other, according to the manner in which the affair might shape itself, to lay hold of Tom Morgan, to persuade him if possible; if not, to use force in order to bring him back home. And now there was no need of persuasion or of force: one look at the boy's face had told him that. But murder had been done; Tom was a fugitive with the gallows awaiting him if he were caught. And those six

men whom Dion had seen in Placerville were riding light. Steele's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"One of yo' boys go tell that Chinaman to get movin'," he ordered. "We're aimin' to shove on right quick."

With that, he and Poole left, and when Dion gained the threshold he saw the two men hurrying to the corral. Their backs were toward him, and he slipped out of the doorway. The teamster with whom he had been staging that argument when he had heard the company riding up was harnessing his mules; save for him and the pair who were nearing the corral, there was no one in sight.

A row of blank doors faced the long veranda; the morning was already growing hot in this first hour after the sunrise. Dion flung the first door open, and he saw a little room, a pine washstand with a bowl and pitcher on it, a dilapidated chair, an unmade bed, and on the bed a man who lay face downward. He did not know that he was looking upon a slayer who was himself to die within a few minutes. He closed the door on Hampton Waugh, and went on to the next one.

The second room was empty, and so was the third. He was opening the fourth door when a footstep behind him made him turn. A thick-set woman whose gingham apron was damp with dishwater, whose brawny arms were bare to the elbow, was regarding him with evident suspicion. He said:

"I'm looking for one of the boys. A young fellow—"

"There's one," she told him, "around the corner of the house. He's young, all right. And he looks sick." She seemed about to ask a question, but her lips went tight and she passed on. Dion ran to the veranda's end; he turned the corner and saw Tom.

THERE was a watering-trough at this end of the building—one of the old-fashioned troughs, built at the height of a man's breast, so that the drivers of the freight wagons could range their animals alongside and let them drink without the necessity of climbing down from the high seats to release the check-reins. Tom was standing with his arms upon the trough's edge. For a few moments after he had laid eyes on the stranger in the barroom, he had been groping after one of those elusive memories which often tantalize a man. But the recognition had not come, and the only association which the memory had brought to him was a picture of wide valley flatlands dotted with huge live oaks, and of a white house upon the summit of a rounded knoll, where poppies and dwarf lupin made great splashes of gold and purple against the wild oats. Then he had become conscious of the long room and the faces of his companions, of tobacco-smoke rising in a thin mist, of the smell of stale liquor and the sound of rough voices; and he had fled the place.

NOW he was standing there beside the watering-trough, and wondering whether he would ever listen to the sweet drowsy calls of the wild doves again, when he heard a step behind him, and turned. It was the stranger whom he had seen in the barroom. As he looked into the face, the feeling of recognition which was just beyond his reach, came back to him.

Then the other spoke his name. And Tom cried:

"Dion!"

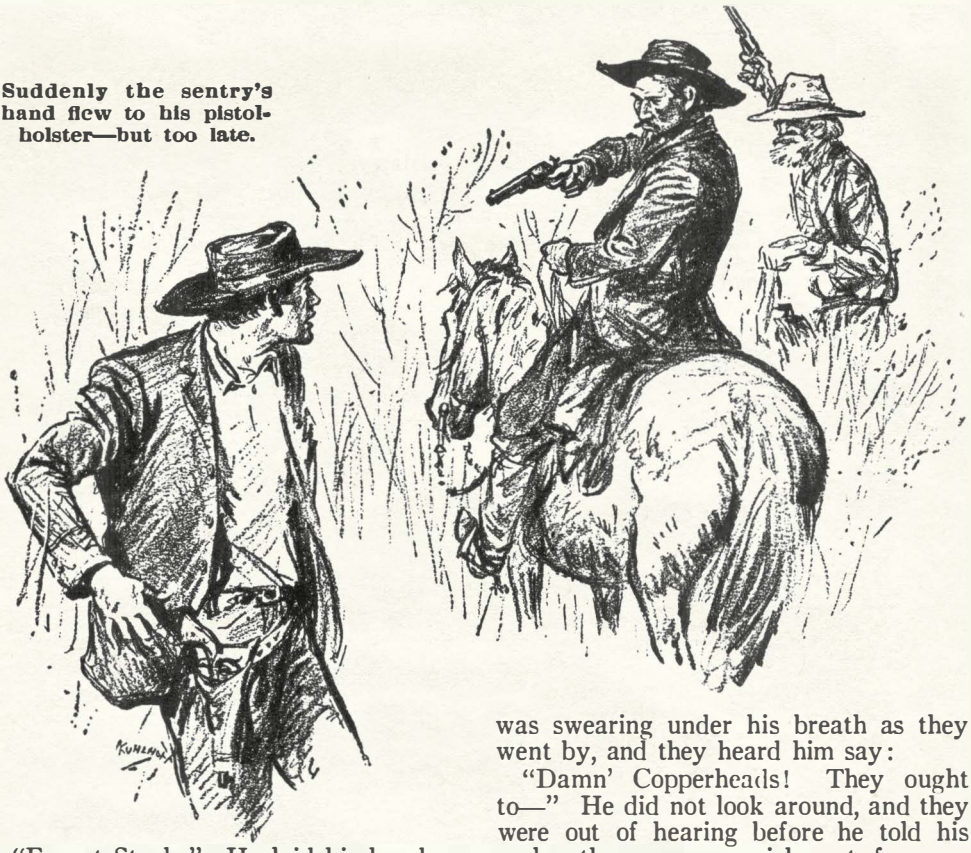
He was stretching out his hand, and for the first time since that awful fifteen minutes on the Placerville road last night, his face had lighted. Dion said:

"Quiet, Tom. We'll shake hands later." It was not easy for him to keep his voice from shaking. For there was all the pathos of youth in that face: the pitiful lack of sophistication, the naïveté: they were still there; they had not been destroyed, but they had been sadly bruised. And the pain that showed in the dark eyes brought to Dion the memory of the awkward boy, in his first adolescence, whom he had rescued one day more than four years ago from the rough baiting of half a dozen vaqueros at that same blacksmith shop where Pete Rodriguez discovered the cut bolt on the singletree. It brought Dion the memory of Irene's ravaged face when she had looked up at him in the paneled dining-room. And it brought the promise which he had made her then. His voice was sharpened with anxiety as he went on:

"I've come to get you out of this." He shook his head when the boy started to speak. "Never mind how I knew that you were here. That'll keep." He was thinking: "He'll come, all right. You just crowd your luck while it's good, Dion. It won't hold for long."

Then Tom spoke:

"What was it Captain Steele said, Dion? He knew you?" And Dion noted the way the boy's voice faltered.



Suddenly the sentry's hand flew to his pistol-holster—but too late.

"Forget Steele." He laid his hand on the youngster's shoulder. "I'm taking you back home." The other swallowed hard and tried to speak, and Dion went on brusquely: "Stick here until I call you."

He stepped over to the corner of the house and looked around. The teamster was hooking up the wheelers' tugs. He was the only man in sight. The growl of voices came from the barroom; out there in the sunlight the mules were stamping nervously, and little wisps of dust rose around them. So for perhaps two minutes. Then the corral gate swung open. Steele came out; the sunshine made his red beard glisten like melted copper; Poole followed him, and the gate banged shut behind them. The two men hurried across the open space and vanished inside the barroom. Dion looked around. *"Now!"* he said, and the boy sprang to his side.

The corral gate was opposite the door of the barroom. The mule team and the heavy freight-wagon were drawn up a few yards from the end of the house where Tom and Dion were standing. They offered the only possible cover.

"Stick close to me," Dion ordered.

They crossed the open interval and passed behind the animals. The teamster was hooking up the swing span; he was swearing under his breath as they went by, and they heard him say:

"Damn' Copperheads! They ought to—" He did not look around, and they were out of hearing before he told his mules the proper punishment for men who abused President Lincoln and General Grant in tavern barrooms. There was another open space between the freight-wagon and the corral fence. When they had passed this, they had the pen between them and the house.

"All right," Dion whispered. "Over we go!"

They scrambled over the fence, and dropped within. The pungent smell of corral dust was in the air, and the reek of sweaty horses. The animals were ranged before several heaps of wild-oat hay. They were untied, but they were saddled; the bridles were hanging by the headstalls from the saddle-horns.

"Take the first you come to," Dion said.

They were bridling the two horses, forcing their mouths open to take the huge spade bits, when they heard the pounding of feet on the veranda. Tom looked around, and Dion swore.

" 'Tend to business," he growled. "You can't quit now."

The youngster nodded, and just then Dion's horse took the bit. When he had slipped the headstall over its ears, he looked around again. Tom's animal was standing with arched neck, ears pricked forward, while the boy struggled to get its clenched teeth apart. His face was white,

his eyes blazing. The next two or three seconds seemed to Dion to stretch to an hour. Then the horse took the bit.

"Never mind that throatlatch," Dion snapped. "We're on our way." He had turned his stirrup and had thrust his foot into it; he was gripping the saddle-horn, when several things happened.

SIX horsemen galloped up the road. The noise of hoof-beats had hardly broken the morning stillness before the Sheriff's double-barreled shotgun bellowed. And immediately after that, the teamster's mules started to run away.

It was one of a hundred little battles which took place along the remote fringes of the Civil War! skirmishes where men died fighting for beliefs they held dear. One of a hundred conflicts which were not recorded in the pages of history, or if they were written, were not glorified. For there were no banners, and there were no uniforms; and John Steele had been quite right when he reminded his followers that the lack of these would change their status in the eyes of men.

It lasted for perhaps two minutes at the outside; and in that time, men who had been jesting a moment before, rose to the heights of self-forgetfulness and passed on to death.

Before the echoes of the first shot had started on their return from the foothills, Dion and Tom Morgan were in the saddles, and as they swung upon their horses' backs, a spectacle confronted them across the ten-rail fence. . . .

The six men in the Sheriff's posse were riding in loose order as they came up to Somerset House. They had been pressing their horses hard all the way from Placerville, and their halt at the scene of the robbery had been brief, for the trail of the fugitives was plainly marked, and the Sheriff was a bold man. If he had been less bold and more disposed toward caution, he might perhaps have given some thought to the weight of bullion which the bushwhackers were carrying, but that had not occurred to any member of the party. In the belief that this stern chase was to be a long chase, they came around the last turn of the road and saw the roadhouse before them. The only man in sight was the teamster. He had fastened the tugs of the swing mules, and was backing the leaders into place; it all looked very peaceful, until the barroom door flew open and John Steele strode forth with Tom Poole at his heels.

The two men halted abruptly in the middle of the veranda; their right hands flew to revolvers in their belts. Steele was dropping to his knees, and Tom Poole's fingers were closing over the butt of his cap-and-ball Colt, when the Sheriff raised his double-barreled shotgun to his shoulder and pressed the trigger. His horse reared at the report of the weapon and pivoted on its hind legs, almost unseating him; he righted himself in the saddle, a tall lean figure swinging against the animal's movement; a cloud of black-powder smoke hazed him, dissolved in the morning sunlight.

Tom Poole slumped to one side. The spiky beard was covered with a red film. He tried to rise to his knees; he struggled for a moment, then he sank down again, and the scarlet blood spread over his brawny chest. John Steele was on one knee, his Colt spitting fire. One of the riders spurred up beside the Sheriff, his long-barreled pistol in hand. The hand dropped to his side; he lurched out of the saddle and the horse spurned his body, wheeling back into the ruck of men and animals behind.

The teamster was fighting to hold the frantic lead mules; their heads were high, and they were lifting him from his feet, swinging him from side to side as if he were a child. He let go of the bridles and fell clear, and the six animals were off in a welter of tangled harness, the huge freight-wagon banging at their heels.

FOUR men were battling to get through the wide doorway of the barroom. While they were striving, the door of the next room flew open, and Hampton Waugh came forth. He stood before the threshold; his feet were planted wide apart; his body was swaying. The Sheriff's shotgun bellowed again; his horse started bucking. Hampton Waugh was lying on his face now, both arms outstretched. His fingers twitched, then became still.

The quartette who had been struggling in the barroom door were out, and their pistols were flaming. Another of the posse slid from his saddle. The Sheriff's horse was making stiff-legged leaps with its back arched in a tight bow. More men surged from the barroom, and the powder-smoke floated from under the veranda roof in a thick white cloud; pale jets of fire showed through it.

The thing ended with the same suddenness with which it had begun. The three posse-men who were still able to control their horses, wheeled them; and

as they rode off in the direction whence they had come, the two riderless horses followed the runaway mule-team up the road. The two men who had fallen in the roadway were lying motionless; they looked like heaps of old clothes. The Sheriff had dropped his empty shotgun, and was pulling on the reins with both hands. The head of his horse came up from between its knees; the animal ceased plunging. A pistol-ball knocked the hat from the Sheriff's head; then he lined his horse out and followed his retreating men on the dead run. . . .

The noises of the runaway were growing fainter, the *clop-clop* of retreating hoofs began to die away. John Steele was bending over Tom Poole. He said:

"We cain't move him, boys. We have got to clear out of this and leave him."

Some of the men gathered around him, staring at the blood-stained figure; the others were clustered around Hampton Waugh's body.

Dion glanced at Tom Morgan; the boy's face was colorless.

"Pull yourself together, Tom," said Dion. "We're on our way."

The loose horses in the corral were galloping around the enclosure, and the dust was blinding as Dion rode up to the gate. He leaned low in the saddle and lifted the heavy wooden latch; the gate swung open slowly. The two men came out, spurring the horses to a run.

CHAPTER X

THE morning sun was hot, and the smell of dust was heavy in the air. The brown foothills stood out sharply against the cloudless sky, dotted with stiff digger pines and dwarf oaks. There was a cut-bank a little way ahead of the two fleeing men, and the red earth of the Sierra foothills glowed like fresh blood. Dion was thinking of something which Pete Rodriguez had said to him after the vaquero had listened to his plan by the cañon mouth behind John Lacy's house. "You dodged hanging tonight, Dion. You'd feel foolish if you was to get hung later on, along with John Steele."

And that was precisely what he was facing now. It occurred to him as he was riding down the road with Tom beside him, that he had a long way to go and many things to do before he could be sure that he was in any better shape than those men behind him on the veranda of the roadhouse. For once the word got back to Placerville and men knew what had taken place here, the roads were going to be full of pursuing posses. And if one of those posses were to capture him, there wouldn't be a chance in the world of his convincing a jury that he was innocent of treason. In this summer of Lincoln's campaign for reëlection, when men of good intentions were deserting the party, when the air was full of rumors of all sorts of plots against the Union, the authorities in Washington weren't running any risks. It was as likely as not that there wouldn't even be a jury; the tribunal which he would have to face, if he were taken, would be military; and he had heard enough of courts-martial to be pretty certain that his own record as a speaker for the Union cause would have little weight against the evidence of his presence at Somerset House with Steele's bushwhackers on this bloody morning.

HE remembered Irene's face looking up into his that afternoon a few days ago in the paneled dining-room, and he told himself:

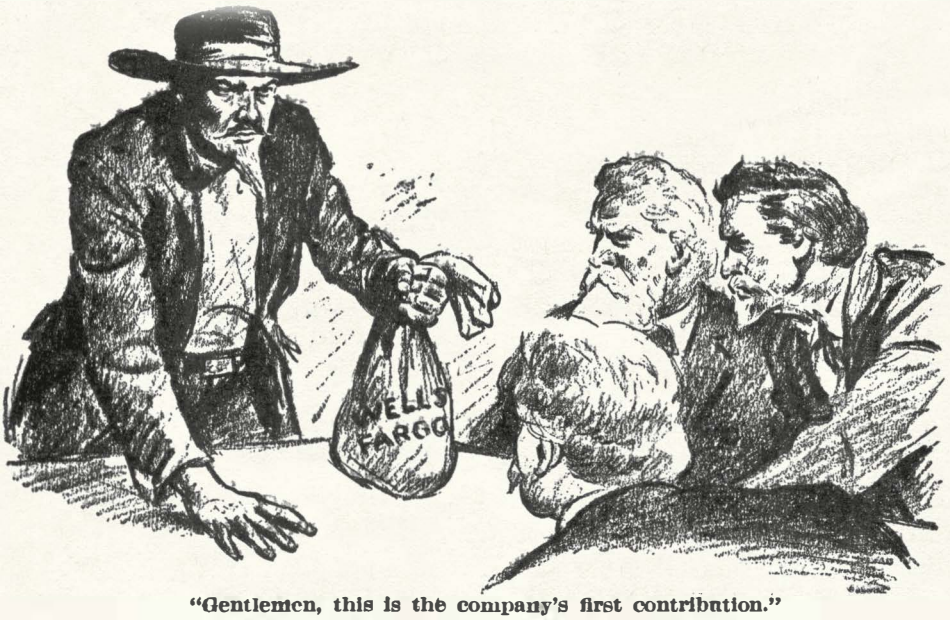
"You'll get through. You've *got* to."

The horses were running free; the beating of their hoofs was punctuated by several sharp pistol reports, and Dion saw a puff of dust spurting up ahead of him. Just beyond the place where the red bank lined it, the road took a sharp turn. He saw Tom lurch sidewise in the saddle. And a moment later the two of them were rounding the curve.

There was a drawn look on Tom's face. His lips were pressed to a thin line; and once when his horse stumbled slightly he swayed in his seat. There was a dark spot on his coat sleeve, a spot that was growing wider. Dion called:

"Can you stick on that horse a little longer?" The boy looked him in the eyes. His lips were still tight but he was smiling; he nodded. If John Steele had seen him, he would have known that his recruit was seasoned now.

The turn of the road was behind them. On their right hand, the hill fell away steeply. There was a thick growth of greasewood and manzanita, shoulder high. The freight-wagon had rounded the curve by some miracle; and here, where the track straightened out, it had gone over the bank. The mules were abandoning themselves to complete hysteria, kicking the wagon to pieces, and lashing out at one another with frenzied abandon.



"Gentlemen, this is the company's first contribution."

Another hundred yards, and the noise of splintering wreckage was growing fainter; then the riders passed beyond hearing, and the only sounds were the squawking of alarmed jays, the thudding of hoofs on the dusty roadway. Dion drew rein and shouted to Tom to pull up.

The dark patch had spread over the sleeve of Tom's coat. Sweat was standing out on his forehead; his face was like wax. Dion said:

"There's water half a mile ahead." And Tom tried to smile as he answered:

"I can make it all right."

But he was very near to failure in the attempt, and during the last three hundred yards they were walking their horses, with Dion, one arm outstretched, gripping the collar of the blood-soaked coat to keep the boy from falling.

Antelope Creek, so the stream was named. On that other day when Dion had ridden up from the San Joaquin valley to Somerset House, he had stopped here to let his horse drink. The pines grew tall on either side, and their branches met overhead, so that the succession of rapids and slight waterfalls came downhill under a fretted ceiling of green shutting out most of the sunshine.

They turned their horses upstream. When they had climbed a few hundred feet, they came to a wide pool, and Dion dismounted; he had to lift Tom from the saddle. There was a strip of sandbar at the pool's lower end. He laid the boy down upon it, removed the blood-soaked coat, cut away the shirt. When he saw the wound, he said:

"Luck's with us, Tom." The ball had passed clear through the muscles of the upper arm, and loss of blood was the main danger. Dion washed his handkerchief in the icy water and tied it above the spot. Then he tore a strip from Tom's shirt and cleansed it, and he set to work at the bandaging.

"When you came to me,"—Tom's voice was a faint murmur,—"I was thinking of home. I was thinking of the wild doves calling in the valley—"

"I heard one calling just now," Dion told him. "Listen!" The voice of the bird came from a distance as he was speaking, but the boy's eyes were closed. And Dion was wondering whether he was going to keep that promise which he had made the girl in the white house on the hill, when suddenly he caught the rattle of hoofs on the road below. The noise came through the lacy foliage, a brief outburst of abrupt sounds. He heard Steele's voice, hard as tempered metal:

"It was Poole's bad luck. If it was me, I'd have wanted yo' to leave me."

The clash of iron shoes against the rocks, the splashing of water, a grumble of lower voices, and then they were gone. A jay screamed noisy defiance after them. And Dion was thinking:

"Every man for himself now, and the devil take the hindmost." He had a mental picture of Steele's face. A man with eyes like those would never allow a disabled companion to stand between him and a cause.

A LITTLE open patch of green grass lay a few yards above the pool, a shelf of level land surrounded by the thickets. He led the saddle-horses to the spot and picketed them out; they fell to

grazing avidly. When Dion returned, Tom had opened his eyes.

"Feeling better?" Dion asked. The boy moved his head in affirmation.

"You'll be able to ride tonight," Dion told him. "You'll get your strength back. I'm going to rustle up some grub. There ought to be meat in these hills."

The morning was still young, but the sun was getting down to real work, and he knew it would not be long before the wild game sought bedding places to sleep the day through. There was no telling how soon the surviving members of the Sheriff's posse might return to take up the chase; it all depended on where they would find reinforcements. The sound of a shot or the smell of fresh wood-smoke later on would bring a dozen men here.

As he climbed up the narrowing ravine, the creek-bed grew steeper—the little waterfalls below were replaced by series of thundering cascades, and there were nests of boulders; the trees were becoming sparser. He was resting after a tough scramble over slippery rocks when he heard something stirring near by. The sound had come from a dense thicket of chaparral, the stuff which the vaqueros in the Coast Range called black brush. Dion watched the spot. He was standing behind a huge boulder looking over its summit, and his pulses had not ceased pounding from the hard work of climbing, when the brush cracked again. A big buck stepped out from behind a patch of toyon bushes. Its long ears were pointing straight toward Dion, and it stamped the dry earth with its sharp forehoofs. Dion rested the long-barreled cap-and-ball revolver on the rock which sheltered him and pulled the trigger. The animal bounded down the hill; but it somersaulted over a low cliff, and when he reached the place, its eyes were already glazing.

He brought the liver back to the pool and cut it into slices; he built a small fire of dry alder branches and sharpened several wands of green wood. After he had broiled the meat on these, he carried water from the pool in his hat and dashed it on the coals.

Tom was lying just as Dion had left him, on his back, with the bandaged arm outstretched upon the cool sand; he was gazing upward through the lacework of green branches. The first time his eyes moved was when Dion came to him with a bit of the broiled liver; he said:

"I can't eat."

"You're going to eat," Dion told him.

The boy took the meat and raised it to his lips; a spasm of nausea shook him.

"You keep on trying," Dion bade him harshly.

The second attempt was as unsuccessful as the first, but in the end he managed to swallow half of his portion. And shortly afterward he fell asleep. Then Dion wolfed down several slices of the unsalted liver and lay down beside him.

THE sun was blazing in the middle of the sky, and the little patches of light which filtered down through the overhanging branches were as hot as if they had come through a burning glass. Dion awakened suddenly to the growl of voices. He was lying on his side, and the first thing upon which his eyes fell as they opened was the head of a horse. He saw the animal's mouth open, the rows of big teeth biting off a tuft of grass. The thicket of green alder brush was like a frame, enclosing this; everything above was hidden. Dion lay motionless, listening.

There was a snapping of twigs, the thudding of restless hoofs, and the voices which had been silent for a moment resumed:

"I'm telling you," one said, "I saw tracks taking off the road—"

"And I'm telling you, what if you did?" another voice interrupted.

Then one of the horses shook itself noisily, and a rider cursed. The last speaker took up his theme with the doggedness of a man who is sure of himself.

"They stopped here to water their horses, and one of 'em went a few steps upstream. We're wastin' time."

It seemed to Dion that they must hear Tom's heavy breathing. He held his own breath while he awaited the answer.

It came in a clatter of receding hoofs. Evidently the last one who had spoken was a leader. There must have been several horsemen, judging by the noise they made; and when they reached the road, the voices of others mingled with theirs. Then the thudding of hoofs diminished and silence closed in again. Dion heard something stirring under the bank. He sprang to his feet, and ran to the spot where he had cached the broiled meat. He had a glimpse of gray fur slipping through the brush. A good half of the liver was gone. He stowed the rest away in a coat pocket. The flies would have spoiled the carcass of the buck by this time. Even if he could salvage something, he dared not build another fire.

The sun was swinging toward the summits of the coast range, when Tom awakened. He asked:

"Got any more of that meat, Dion?" His voice was stronger now, and he raised himself upon one elbow.

"Got plenty," Dion told him.

The boy ate like a starved dog. "If we had salt," he said, "this would be good."

When he had finished, there were two slices left. It seemed to Dion that he had never been hungrier in his life than he was just then. But he left the two slices in the coat pocket.

"We're going to pull out of this as soon as it's dark," he announced. "Try and get some more sleep. It'll be a hard ride down to the river."

THE afternoon dragged on by. Tom dozed, wakened and dozed again. Dion sat with his back to the bank; he was trying to forget that he was hungry, that next to food, he wanted a smoke more than anything in the world. But he had managed to lose his tobacco somewhere along the road.

It was an hour after sunset when he saddled up the horses and led them down to the pool. Tom was sitting up.

"How's the arm?" Dion asked.

"Stiff." Tom shook his head. "It's sore when I move it."

"It'll be sorer by morning," Dion told him. He helped the boy into the saddle. "We take the side hill," he announced. "No use running chances down on the road."

They gave the horses loose rein and kept them to a running walk. Now and then they hung to one of those narrow winding trails which the deer had made, going back and forth from water. Dion rode ahead, picking out the open spaces, for the road was not far below them, and he dared not risk the noise which the animals would make in the chaparral.

They were traveling along a stretch of easy hillside where the wild oats swished against the legs of the horses, when Tom repeated the question which he had asked at the watering-trough that morning:

"How did you come to Somerset House, Dion?"

"It was Irene," said Dion. "She was worrying about you. She wrote me, and I came down from San Francisco." He told the story then, not all of it; he left out the most essential element, the love for the girl which had brought him on this errand.

Tom made only one comment:

"Somehow, when I saw you there at the watering-trough, when I knew that it was you, I wasn't surprised."

After that they rode on in silence for some time, and Dion was thinking of days long gone, when he and Irene and Tom had been children on neighboring ranches. It was always Tom who was getting into trouble; it was always Irene who was coming to Dion with news of the new scrape, and Dion who pulled the boy out of it. He was wondering whether he was going to be able to do it this time, when Tom said:

"Got any more of that deer liver, Dion?"

He devoured the last two slices in two gulps.

"This arm," he announced querulously, "is raising hell. Do we have to ride much farther?"

"Till we make the valley flats," Dion answered over his shoulder. "Then we'll hole up somewhere and wait for night."

It was coming on toward dawn when they reached the level lands, and they pulled off into a sea of wild mustard which grew so high that there were spaces where they could not see above it. Here they found a spot to tether the horses, and they slept until the sun was near the middle of the sky.

IT was another of those hot days. There was not a breath stirring, and the air was musty with the smell of drying mustard. Tom's eyes were overbright, and there were two spots of red on his cheeks; the thirst which comes with fever was torturing him. Dion was in nearly as bad a case. By mid-afternoon, he saw that the boy was about to get light-headed.

"Stick here," he said, "and wait. I'm going to find water."

Then he set forth. The mustard hid everything; its brittle stems crackled with every step he took.

"This won't do," he reflected, and he dropped on his hands and knees. His progress was more silent now, but it was slower. At last the weeds began to thin, and he saw the light growing stronger ahead of him. A moment afterward he felt the cold touch of dampness on his knees, and crept out from the thicket to see what looked a sea before him: a sea above whose swirling waters patches of tree-tops arose like tiny islands. He took off his hat, and as he filled it, he was asking himself whether they had come all this distance, escaping bullets

and pursuing posses, only to find the road to safety blocked against them.

It took him a long time to retrace his trail by the broken weeds, and when he reached Tom at last, the water was more than half gone. The boy drank the few swallows that were left, in deep gasps.

"I'll get more," Dion said. "It won't take so long this time."

BUT the promise of a speedy return turned out untrue. When Dion emerged from the mustard, he came face to face with a burly man who stood at the road's edge with his hands in his trousers pockets, regarding the newcomer with mild surprise. And before Dion could speak, the man said:

"Looking to get acrost?"

Long afterward, when it was too late for anything more valuable than self-reproach, Dion remembered the look in that man's eyes when he said it. He was a red-faced man, and his shirt was stained with sweat; it was open at the chest, and there was an odor of horses about him. His eyes were hard, and there were little shrewd lines around them.

But Dion was not thinking of this at the time; it merely registered in his mind, to recur later. He told himself luck had been good to him once more.

"Got a boat?" he asked.

The man nodded.

"Only boat in ten miles. I'll take you for ten dollars."

And Dion said:

"I've a friend with me."

The other had started down the road. He answered over his shoulder:

"Fetch him here."

"We've got two horses," Dion called after him, and the man nodded.

Dion plunged back into the wild mustard. When he found Tom, the boy's eyes had lost some of the over-brightness; the hectic spots were not so vivid on his cheeks. But the arm was paining him a good deal, and he let a sharp exclamation of distress escape him when Dion helped him into the saddle.

The road looked level, but it vanished in the swirling water a few rods farther on. The blocky man was standing there beside a big flat-bottomed boat. If he felt any surprise at the sight of Tom's bandaged arm, he did not show it; but before the two passengers climbed into the scow he demanded his ten dollars. Dion handed him a gold-piece, and he shoved off without another word.

Tom was sitting in the bow, and Dion was in the stern; he held the tie-ropes, and the horses swam behind.

The San Joaquin was covering all the lower flats; it was like being ferried across an enormous lake. And during all the better part of an hour that the transit took, there was not a word spoken. Just the thumping of the oars in the tholepins, and the muttering of the water against the boat's side. At last the blunt prow grounded, and the two passengers stepped out on what was evidently a continuation of the road which led down to the opposite shore. There were many hoof-tracks here; the wild mustard was trampled down on either side. Dion was frowning as he looked at the marks of horses, when he heard a crackling in the weeds. Half a dozen riders burst forth. He had a glimpse of John Steele's red beard with the sunlight shining upon it; and the voice of the bushwhacker came to his ears like that of an unkind Fate:

"Keep yo' hand away from that pistol. Now, boys, look after him."

Steele rode up to the ferryman and handed him a gold-piece. Some one took Dion's revolver from its holster. The Captain spurred his animal back up the road. He looked down on the pair of captives from the saddle.

"I was hopin' yo'-all would come along," he drawled. He nodded at Dion. "I aim to find out who yo' are when we get back to Fiddletown."

CHAPTER XI

HE was, if he had only known it, a pathetic figure, this little man with snowy mustache and the white wisp of imperial. The baggy homemade trousers of brown wool, the green coat whose elbows were all too shiny, the wide-rimmed black hat which he wore rakishly at one side; the string tie, the frayed starched collar and the cuffs which had been worn threadbare; and above all, the indomitability which showed in his bright old eyes—these things made him a figure emblematic of blazing hopes destined to be extinguished. But he did not know that he was as sorrowful an object as the cause—soon to be known by its adherents as the Lost Cause—which kept his heart beating hard that sunny morning on the main street of Fiddletown.

"Mo'nin', Jedge." The salutation came from the town drunkard, who was basking on the corner; it came through

the open door of the general store, where the proprietor was waiting on a sunbonneted woman in calico. It came with the soft deference due to a dignitary, and he responded with the good-natured ease of one who knows he has a right to dignity. Judge Barker; that was what they called him in Fiddletown. His was the mind which had drawn up the somewhat forensic articles of secession by which the little town had astonished adjoining neighborhoods, articles that had been forgotten in the stress of war's fer-

vid politics down in the more thickly populated valley; but they had not been forgotten here. Really he was no judge at all, nor had ever been one. Just a poor old lawyer, whose negligible practice and his duties as justice-of-the-peace occasionally brought him a cord of firewood or a little garden truck by way of fees. That was the way the rest of the world would have regarded him. Not so in Fiddletown, however, for the village was observing its own standards, even as it was holding to its own beliefs.

You would have needed to be accustomed to Fiddletown to realize that there was, this morning, excitement here. For if you had not known the village as it was on other days, when it drowsed through the long sunlit hours from dawn until dusk, you would have thought it was asleep now, and would never have dreamed that in the handful of tanned little boys who were clustered at the post-office corner, in the wakefulness of the town drunkard, in the sprinkling of saddle-horses tethered to hitching posts, and the group of schoolgirls decked out in white who were on their way home—that in all these unwonted signs there was evidence of a holiday spirit. If you had known the daily life of the foothill villages in those years when thirty miles off on a side-road rendered a community more remote from the affairs of mankind than a native town of mud huts in the middle of an African jungle is today, you would have understood that something unusual had been going on here.

FOR the handfuls of men and women, the town drunkard, the boys, the schoolgirls in stiff white dresses—all these had been either spectators or participants in one of those old-time programs which used to be known as Exercises. Here in front of the schoolhouse steps on the main street, in the broad sunlight of the California coast hills, a flag whose red field was crossed by two blue stripes, the stripes adorned by white stars, had floated; the little girls had sung Rebel songs in thin piping treble; and a cluster of unshaven men who had but recently looted a stage on the Placerville road had listened to Judge Barker's wavering voice as he mingled phrases of defiance to the Union with phrases of fulsome praise for deeds which other men less than fifty miles away would have called by ugly names.

The Confederate flag was rolled up on its staff, and was hidden away in the cottage of its custodian, who was the Baptist minister. The participants and the audience were dispersed. So was the bushwhacker company. Some of its members were riding homeward, and a few were lingering in Fiddletown's only barroom. Judge Barker, who had delivered the oration of the day, just as he had always read the Declaration of Independence on the Fourth of July, was walking up the street to the small town hall where certain matters not for the public ear were awaiting settlement.

It was a small building, painted white; and in front of the door there were four fluted pillars of wood supporting a little portico. For the fathers and the mothers of Fiddletown had come from other sleepy villages on the mellow slopes of hills nearly three thousand miles away, and their children had been growing up in the tradition of the old South. And when Judge Barker entered the front door, there were three men awaiting him whose clothes, whose white locks and snowy goatees, whose soft drawling speech, were of the same pattern as his. They were sitting behind a worn table, the table behind which Judge Barker occasionally presided when he served the little town as justice-of-the-peace, and he took the one vacant chair among them. With them he awaited the coming of a visitor, and during the few moments of their waiting, he was silent as they too were silent, thinking over the proud event of this day.

There was a loose floorboard on the narrow veranda behind the four white wooden pillars, and it rattled to the footfall of their caller. His figure darkened the doorway, a slim figure; his hat was in his hand, and his red hair glistened vividly. He looked a little weary this morning. His face was drawn; his eyes were veiled more thickly than usual by that mist of gray which always hung before them; his shoulders were straight as ever, but there was patent evidence of the effort which it cost him to hold his poise.

He came up the aisle between the rows of battered chairs, and stood before the table. He bore a small canvas sack in one hand, and he laid it upon the table; the sack gave forth a metallic chink. The eyes of the old men hung upon it. And for that eagerness in their eyes there was good cause. There was the memory of sons who had gone forth three years before when the fiery Terry and his group had ridden southward through California to make their way to the armies of Lee and Stonewall Jackson; of sons who had ridden away with these leaders. And there was the memory of the pitiful savings which these old men had scraped together through the years that followed, the contributions which they had sent to Richmond; there was the more poignant memory of their own growing feebleness, which had kept them at home here in the West, when they would gladly have given up their lives on bloody Eastern hillsides.

"Sheriff Wheeler stuck by his promise," Pete said later.

John Steele said: "Gentlemen, this is the company's first contribution. There is more yet to come: the silver bullion. But we were pressed hard; we were obliged to leave that behind, temporarily."

Several men were riding up the street. The sound of hoofs grew louder, and John Steele ceased speaking. The horses stopped before the building; the loose floorboard on the veranda rattled again. Then the door swung open.

MORNING was drawing on toward noon, and the rocks on the flanks of the coast range foothills gave forth heat waves which shimmered in the sunshine. But the redwoods in the cañon behind John Lacy's house rendered a grateful shade and it was pleasantly cool in the little park where John Steele's bushwhackers had listened to his speech on that midnight before they departed on their raid. Now the only sounds here were the squawking of a camp-robber jay, the shrill whistling of a broad-winged hawk which was soaring out of sight above the tree-tops, the subdued voices of two men.

Dion was sitting with his back against one of the huge trunks. His hands were folded on his lap, and it would have needed a second glance to tell you, if you had passed him then, that he held them thus because his wrists were bound. Tom Morgan was lying beside him; the boy's eyes were still bright with fever, and his cheeks were flushed. They were talking under their breaths, and the man on guard could not have heard what they were saying had he tried to listen. But he was not trying; he was standing aloof, gazing straight before him with sullen

eyes, trying to picture the fun down in Fiddletown which he had missed because his captain had given him this sentry duty.

"They tried to get me to talk, Dion," Tom said. "Captain Steele kept after me all the way back here. He told me that he'd find out who you were anyhow, that I couldn't do you any good by keeping my mouth shut. But I didn't answer a single question."

There was pride in his eyes and his young lips were firm. Then the pride departed, and a sudden anxiety took its place.

"Do you think there's a chance, Dion?"

"Sure, Tom," Dion answered swiftly. "There's every chance in the world. When I left last week, I told Pete Rodriguez what to do. And he'll 'tend to it."

But the certainty in his voice did not come from any assurance that these plans were going to carry through. And there were several things which Dion could have told Tom, things which he was keeping to himself:

How the sentry, whom he and Pete Rodriguez had left senseless beside the road that night when they first came here, had come this morning to confront him. And how John Lacy had denounced him to the captain a half-hour later.

It was shortly afterward that the bushwhackers had ridden away to Fiddletown. Nothing had been said as to what was to be done with the prisoners, but Dion had seen enough of Captain Steele to be certain what his own sentence was to be. The only reason it had been deferred was the red-bearded captain's desire to keep the execution as quiet as possible. When the festivities were over down in Fiddletown, a few of them would come back, three or four of the older ones, men who were case-hardened and could keep their own counsel. But during these hours while he had been awaiting their return, Dion had one comfort: The chances were that Tom was to live. . . . To live—perhaps to ride forth again, perhaps to escape.

THEY were coming now. No doubt about that sound; there were several horsemen, and they were riding fast. Dion saw the foremost rider bursting through the brush, where the wagon-road led down the cañon. Suddenly the sentry's hand flew to his pistol-holster—but too late. And Dion caught the flash of sunlight on the metal star which the rider wore upon his breast.

The arrest was made without a word spoken, without the firing of a shot. The sentry was still fumbling with his pistol-butt when the posse-men spurred through the chaparral; in the next moment the little park was noisy with trampling horses, and then the Sheriff snapped a pair of handcuffs on the man's wrists.

A curious thing took place right after that. When the Sheriff had swung from the saddle to take his prisoner, he came face to face with the two men beside the redwood tree. But in that moment his whole attention was centered on the bushwhacker. And when the latter had been disarmed, it seemed as if the Sheriff had forgotten about Dion and Tom. It seemed as if he had never seen them at all.

And it was so with all the others in the little troop. There was something about the manner in which these men ignored that pair beside the tree which was altogether too elaborate—and something in the haste of their departure which Tom Morgan failed to understand.

They were gone as suddenly as they had come, and the little park was lapsing to its former stillness.

Tom said:

"What does it mean?"

And Dion smiled, for now he was sure that Pete Rodriguez had carried through his plan.

"We'll wait and see," he told the boy.

It was nearly a half an hour later when they heard the brush crack and they saw the vaquero's face emerging through the screen of green branches.

DION and Pete Rodriguez were sitting under the sycamores by Bill Minor's adobe house early that afternoon. The stage-robber was inside, helping his wife and the Mamita to get Tom Morgan into bed. The ride down from the redwood grove had not done the boy any good, but the women said that the fever would depart with rest and proper nursing.

"I kept my end of the bargain," Pete was saying. "I told the Sheriff I'd find out when they came back to Fiddletown, and I'd let him know in time. And Sheriff Wheeler stuck by his promise. Which wasn't so easy, Dion. You know the way these posses are. But he had picked good men.

"They didn't have any trouble in Fiddletown. They rounded the whole bunch up inside of half an hour. They got John Steele and three old fire-eaters in the city hall with several thousand dollars in gold

on the table in front of 'em. It was after that the hard work came, to pick the right men, fellows who could keep their mouths shut; and they had to ride fast to John Lacy's place to keep the news behind them. Well, they got Lacy at his house, and you can bet there won't be any talk about seeing you two up there in the redwoods."

The door of the house opened, and Bill Minor came out; he threw himself down beside them just as Dion was asking about Sam Anderson.

Pete chuckled.

"Within two days after I had my first talk with Sheriff Wheeler, he found out the way the land lays there. It was like you figured, Dion. Sam Anderson has been robbing old man Morgan's estate. That's the reason he wanted to get rid of Tom. He let Steele do his recruiting in Fiddletown on the agreement that Tom would be talked into joining the company. I reckon he didn't care much whether the boy got killed or hung. It was all the same to him."

"I'm sure of it," Dion said.

"Anyhow," Pete went on, "he's told everything he knows. Which, the Sheriff says, wasn't needed anyhow. They've got descriptions from Placerville which fit most of the gang. The best of 'em came from a girl that was a passenger in the stage."

Bill Minor had one terse comment:

"Bushwhackers! Why, I have got a ten-year-old boy that could do better than they did—if I'd let him go wrong, which I do not aim to."

IN those years the wheels of justice revolved more slowly than they do now. What with semi-annual sessions of court, the time it took to gather juries, and the inevitable delays which accompanied a rawer civilization, it was the following year before the trials of the main conspirators were finished in Placerville. It was, even in those tumultuous times, a *cause célèbre.* The columns of the *Alta Californian* and the Sacramento *Bee* were filled with it. One of the pair was sentenced to be hanged.

That was Tom Poole. The ex-sheriff of Monterey County was a sad-looking sight in the courtroom, for his face bore the scars of half a dozen buckshot. But he took the verdict bravely, just as he took the execution several weeks later.

So too did John Lacy accept the verdict of the jury who heard his case. And when the court sentenced him to twenty years, his somber eyes gave no sign of feeling.

As to John Steele, you may look in the records of these cases and you will find no word concerning him. That happened many times in the North during the Civil War; it happened in California more than once. And subsequent revelations which leaked out after the close of the struggle go to show that these cases were handled by military tribunals; that if the old stone dungeons on Alcatraz Island could speak, they would have some remarkable secrets to reveal.

WITH the ending of the war, feelings which had been high and hot began to cool down, and this was particularly true throughout the far West, because of the remoteness from the battlefields. So in the Santa Clara Valley neighbors went about their business, forgetting former differences in some instances, and in others making no mention of them.

So the real reason which lay behind young Tom Morgan's enlistment in John Steele's quixotic project never got abroad. Nor did the enlistment itself. And the homecoming which took place within two weeks of that morning when Tom was carried into Bill Minor's house was not known to any of the neighboring ranches in the valley, for it took place by night.

Tom Morgan was able to walk from the two-seated carriage which had taken him down out of the foothills, but he was pretty badly shaken, what with the fever of his wound and the shock of his experience upon the Placerville road. So he was leaning on Dion's arm when they came into the front hallway where Irene was standing by the door.

She said: "Oh, Tom!"

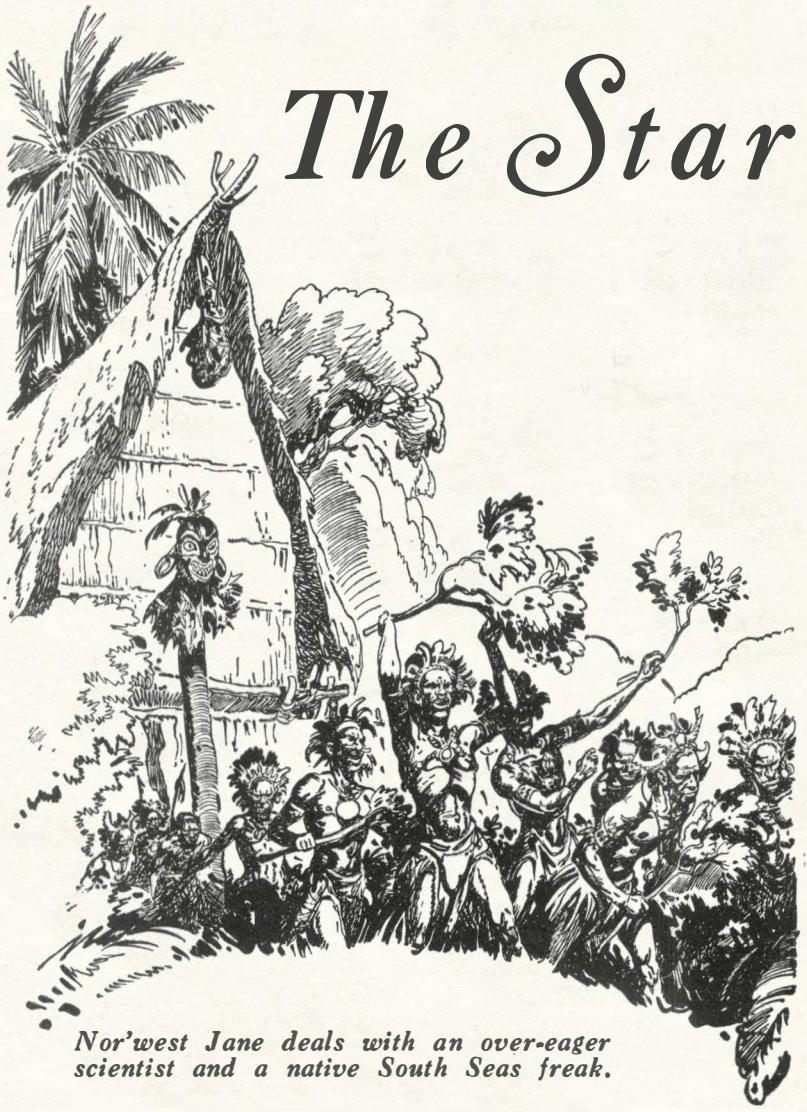
And that was all. She tried to say more, but the words would not come. And the first tears which she had shed since that day when John Steele had left her in the dining-room were in her eyes as she threw her arms about her brother.

Later those arms were around Dion's shoulders. And her face was pressing against his. The two of them were alone then, in the somber paneled dining-room where they had embraced for the first time, leaving unspoken the love which they had discovered. Now that his errand was done, he found time at last to tell her what was in his heart.

THE END

The Star

Pen drawings by John Richard Flanagan



Nor'west Jane deals with an over-eager scientist and a native South Seas freak.

SELDOM, to Nor'west Island, came travelers or tourists. The large boats—all of four thousand tons—stopped at Samarai; the small boats, ketches and schooners of a hundred or less, didn't ask for passengers, and didn't treat them nobly when they came. Few people ventured the trip a second time.

Of these brave hearts was Lombard, yellow-haired and young—an anthropologist, furiously cultured and fanatically eager; and all his softness lay upon his undoubtedly pleasing surface.

Lombard, not new to the great dark island of which Nor'west Jane was the acknowledged uncrowned queen; Vasco, the plump pearl-buyer of undefined east Mediterranean race; Junia, his daughter, eighteen or so in years, and forty in wisdom; and Jane, grass-widowed from her wedding, in her late twenties, red-haired and blue-eyed, stood together in the sago-swamp beside the headhunters' village, and discussed business. Nobody noticed the heat, which at this hour of afternoon was appalling—they were all salted to hot climates. Nobody thought or spoke of the stained-glass-window beauty of the towering sagoes, with the sun striking through their enormous fans of emerald and amber; the conference of four included no tourists; and business, to them all, was paramount. Junia's business was just the job a girl has to carry through sometime or other, sooner rather than later—Lombard being, for the moment, the "prospect" without which a deal is not a deal. Vasco, fat, perspiring and disappointed, was trying to maintain, in the face of known facts, that Nor'west must be a pearling proposition, because of the immense freak pearl that had once been found there, spewed

# of Death

By
BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

up by a volcanic explosion. Lombard was looking for material for a pamphlet that should stir the dovecotes of several learned societies. And Jane—

But Jane could speak for herself.

"There isn't," she said, looking very tall in her clean white frock, and keeping her eyes fixed on the stockade of the village, where chained cockatoos were already announcing the arrival of guests, "there isn't nothing, not in the way of pearls, in all these seas; and I reckon I know, because why, I'd have had my husband Jack out of that Sydney hospital where they can't do nothing for him, and away to the American place that makes you think of fowls—what do they call it?"

"Chicago?" ventured Lombard. "But it isn't pron—"

"That's right. Chicago. There's a doctor there who can cut you up and put you together again, so they say; and by jings, I'd 'a' given Jack his chance if

there'd been sight or smell of a pearl, except that one that was only fit to break people's heads with; they called it a museum piece and gave us not half enough. So you see," she concluded.

The small plump man from the Mediterranean unsnapped his cigar-case—offered it to Lombard, who shook his head, —lit an enormous cylinder and spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

"You've lent your horses, and brought us to the place we want to see."

"Two pounds a day," interjected Jane.

"And pearls or no pearls, we want to see all over it. All over it," he repeated significantly. "We understand, Junia and I, that you've got these people under control and won't let them harm anybody—"

"Nor let anybody harm them," added Jane.

A flash of understanding passed from the brilliant eyes of Junia to her father's small bright eyes which had maybe, once, been large and shining too. They say that girls take temperament from their fathers.

"Let's put our cards on the table," Vasco said coaxingly. "You're a business woman—"

"Am I?" Jane said musingly, as if she were asking the question of herself.

Junia gave a small tinkling laugh, and looked at Lombard. She caught the flash of Jane's wide blue-green eyes in ricochet. "I thought so," silently she said. "Soppy about him. In spite of dear invalid husbands."

Her father went on: "If you've anything worth showing to us, trot it out. Why," he said, growing suddenly warm, "I have found sousands and sousands of things besides pearls, a sousand times as valuable. I'm what you'd call an impresario of the uncommon. Pearls, yes —when there's nothing better."

Lombard—who didn't understand all this, didn't know for the life of him why Jane was looking troubled, and Vasco eager—said: "As for uncommon, Papua's the home of that. Paradise for entomologists, biologists, especially marine, and for chaps like me; skull-hunters, you know." He was stating a simple fact; but the recoil of it astonished him.

"I said so," Vasco was exclaiming excitedly. "Didn't I was saying, Junia, on that boat, that the story was true, and didn't you was saying it was impossible? Well, here's a man of the science, who tells you. In the seas, on the earths, this country has more strangenesses—"

"You never told me you were interested in any of the sciences," Lombard intervened skeptically.

"No, no, no. For sciences, I am ignorant. Except the big science of all, money. And her I know." He raised himself on his toes, and sank back again, as if in ecstasy. "Money—it grows in strange places. Mrs. Jane, it shall grow for you and for the gentleman who wants to go to Chicago—ah, the terrible place! —if you will take us all, one-two-three, go! to where that god lives."

"God?" put in Lombard. "These people don't have gods."

"They've got a chap," Jane somewhat reluctantly said, "who doesn't go out in daylight, and has a fine house to himself. And they feed him bonzer, and give him presents. And they do reckon he's something above human, like."

"Well?" asked Lombard, still puzzled.

Jane suddenly broke out:

"If some one or other—maybe it was that Greek recruiter—hadn't been and told, and it got out down to Sydney, I wouldn't 'a' said a word if you'd burned me alive. These blokes is all the same as my children, which I haven't got and never won't have, so far's I know. . . .

But Mr. Vasco, he said it was five hundred if it was true. And if he promises—"

"Promises what? And what's true?" demanded Lombard, who was now becoming as curious as anyone else.

Jane's answer exploded like a shell: "True about the man with the tail."

Lombard said excitedly, "My *dear* Jane!" Junia Vasco emitted a laugh of the kind once called silvery. "How altogether priceless!" she drawled.

Jane went on: "If he and all of you promises that the poor cow won't be annoyed in no way, I'll call them off that's looking at you through the stockade with their bows drawn, and show you his house. But go easy," she added. "I don't want none of my boys getting into no trouble for killing white men. They're fine boys, and I'm ejicating them as fast as I can; but jings, they're no Sunday-school kids, and maybe I wouldn't like them as well if they was."

Vasco said pleasantly: "I hear you've taught them to speak English."

"I learned them that proper," Jane agreed. "Nobody allowed in my store that didn't talk nothing only good English. You can talk to Bulupo himself if he'll let you; he's shy sometimes. There, they're coming out to meet you with branches of trees; that means it's all right."

A FEW minutes later Lombard and Vasco emerged from a high thatched native hut. They seemed excited. That was nothing remarkable with Vasco, who habitually boiled at as low a temperature as a Hollywood director; but Jane remembered—what did she not remember about Lombard?—that she had never, until now, seen him moved out of his scientific self-possession.

"Grand!" Vasco was saying. "Superb! Junia, didn't I was telling you it could be true—anything could be true, about this mad country?"

Lombard declared: "The most perfect specimen ever discovered. Nothing like it before. If I can exhibit him before the—"

"Exhibit him?" Vasco called profanely upon several of his gods. "No! I shall pay the money. I shall show him. He is a fortune. Listen, Junia, he has a tail—but a tail like a cat, with fur; and he can wave that tail so that you will cry with wonder."

Jane suddenly broke in, much after the manner of a policeman on duty: "What's all this about? Show him?

You'll not do no such thing! Why, stone the crows! I said you could see him—photo him—"

"It doesn't matter if you said a sousand sings," excitably interrupted Vasco. "This man, this invaluable curio, he says he wants to go."

"And you've filled the poor fool up with your chat about the food he'll have, and the ships he'll travel on, and the things he'll see—like one of them damn' recruiters that comes taking them away with their lies?"

"Jane," said Lombard pacifically, "take it sensibly. This fellow is of enormous scientific importance. You couldn't deprive—"

"Don' mind her. The man, he says to me he'll go. And shall I throw a fortune in the sea?" Vasco spread out scornful hands. "And you, Mrs. Jane, will you don't take the money that will send your 'usband to the American doctors?"

Jane had never looked handsomer than as she answered him. Lombard, vexed as he was by her opposition, could not but admire her splendid figure, posed beside Junia's equally beautiful but tiny form.

"My man," said Jane, "was the finest man in the Islands. He was that fine

they chucked him out of the Tongas, before he married me, because them islands was full of rich princesses, and they was afraid one of them would up and marry him. He was like that. And he'd maybe be like that again, if— But I don't sell no one away from his home because of Jack."

"Home!" Lombard repeated with indignation. "But—"

JANE said: "I seen a woman, when I was in Australia, going round to fairs as the Fat Lady. They dolled her up in red-and-blue velvets and gave her rings and bracelets and white boots with buttons. The people walked past her and talked about her and poked her, same as they talked about and poked beasts in the other part of the show. She used to be smiling all the time, and nodding her poor fat neck at them."

"Well? Sounds all right."

"Does it? I went behind and seen her after. She was lying on the floor, like two barrels that'd been upset in a barroom, and the way she was crying—she says to me: 'It's hell. But don't tell them I told.' And she rolls over and pulls herself up and begins to sing, with the tears hopping down her fat cheeks, for fear the manager would come in and catch her. 'It's hell,' says she."

Lombard made an impatient noise. "There's no need to be sentimental over it. The man says he'd like to go; you can't get over that."

"Can't I?" demanded the Queen of Nor'west, opening her eyes very wide. (And when Jane opened wide her eyes, those who knew her best made haste to stand from under.) "I've only to lift my hand, and not one of you would leave this place alive."

"Does she was telling truth, or not?" crisply demanded Vasco.

"Jane's no liar." Lombard replied.

"But Mrs. Jane," Junia said, "would never harm—you." She looked at Lombard softly, through eyelashes dark and long as rushes set about a twilit mountain tarn. Junia was twilight, even as Jane was splendid day.

Lombard was smiling; hard to say at what, or at whom. "I shouldn't bet on it," he stated. "What do you say, Jane? Are you going to give your boys three more heads for the clubhouse?"

Jane said, trembling all over: "I could."

"I don't doubt it," Lombard said. He was looking at Junia as he spoke, giving her a flashing smile.

Perfectly conscious of the danger of rousing Nor'west Jane to anger, Lombard, who liked to take chances, took his chances now.

It was Vasco, the business man, who hurriedly threw oil on the stormy waters.

"Off course, off course, my dear lady, we will do as you say. Let us take photos, plenty of photos, and we wasn't asking any more."

"Cross your heart, is that true?" Jane demanded. She was still breathing heavily; her face was white beneath its tan.

"Cross my heart, lungs and liver, and kidneys too, if you are liking it," obligingly answered Vasco.

There was a moment's silence. A long way off, the reef made honeyed thunder, stirred by rising tides. So still was it in the village, that the clinking of the shell and bead harness worn by the head-hunters could be heard as the wearers breathed. How much they understood, no one could say. But they watched the face of the strangers, and of Jane.

"Jingoes!" said Jane suddenly. "You know I can't do it. Can't set them on you!" Her hands went up before her face.

From the savages, waiting, came one or two curious clucks of sympathy, mingled with annoyance.

"Let's get home," the Queen of Nor'west ordered. "Them blokes, they don't like to see me vexed, no matter who done it. Lombard, I reckon you're telling the truth anyhow. We'll let it go at that."

"But we're all telling the truth, Mrs. Jane," softly expostulated Junia, sidling over toward the young scientist. Her action said—and was meant to say: "Whatever comes of this, I'm on your side."

IT was high noon in the village when they came back next day; Vasco and Lombard armed with cameras; Junia, exquisite in orange linen, prepared to stand by her father to the last ditch, and incidentally to rivet Lombard's fetters a little more closely. She did not quite like the familiar old-friend style of his address to Jane. Jane was opposed to Vasco; Junia didn't mind that, but she feared, somewhat, the possible influence of Lombard—if Lombard let himself be talked over. This small, dainty creature with the soft dark eyes was at heart a true child of clever, greedy Vasco; like her father, she had already gauged to a pound the value of Bulupo; she did not mean to miss her share, whoever suffered.

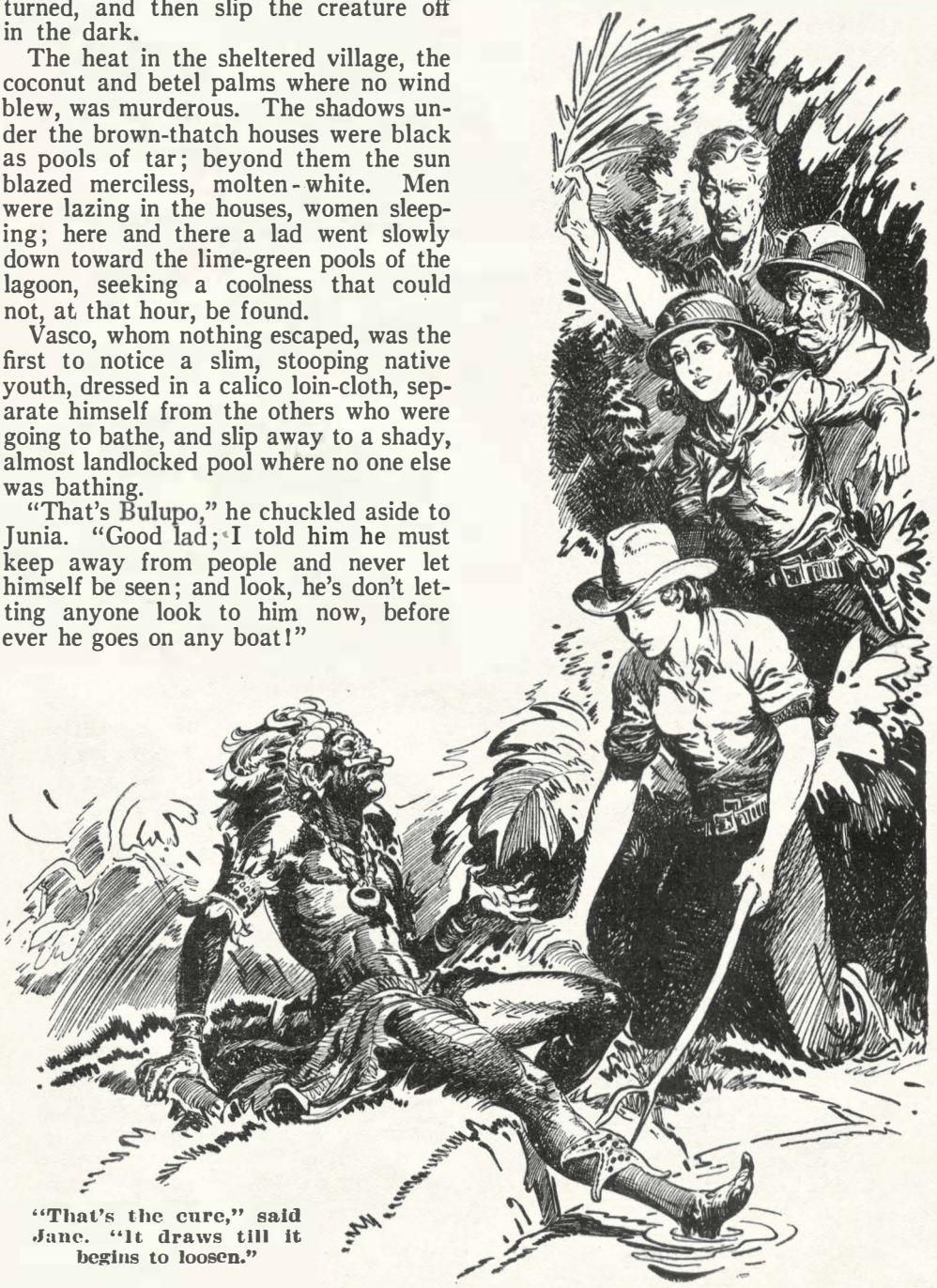
They'd have to let Lombard show the creature once—just once—before some scientific society; and then, as long as he lasted (Junia knew the trade in human freaks: knew, better than Nor'west Jane, how they broke and crumpled, and died at last, burned up by the glare of a million gazing eyes), she and her father would reap harvest. As for the photographs—but better take them; keep this obstinate woman quiet till the boat returned, and then slip the creature off in the dark.

The heat in the sheltered village, the coconut and betel palms where no wind blew, was murderous. The shadows under the brown-thatch houses were black as pools of tar; beyond them the sun blazed merciless, molten-white. Men were lazing in the houses, women sleeping; here and there a lad went slowly down toward the lime-green pools of the lagoon, seeking a coolness that could not, at that hour, be found.

Vasco, whom nothing escaped, was the first to notice a slim, stooping native youth, dressed in a calico loin-cloth, separate himself from the others who were going to bathe, and slip away to a shady, almost landlocked pool where no one else was bathing.

"That's Bulupo," he chuckled aside to Junia. "Good lad; I told him he must keep away from people and never let himself be seen; and look, he's don't letting anyone look to him now, before ever he goes on any boat!"

Jane, a little way off, had her eye on Bulupo too. "That's queer," she said to Lombard, who was putting a film in his camera. "None of them boys ever goes bathing in that little lagoon; they say it's full up of devils. I dunno where they got the notion, but they're not fond of bathing in the place. And may I go hopping to church, if I know where Bulupo got the notion of going there."



"That's the cure," said Jane. "It draws till it begins to loosen."

Lombard could have told her, but judged it wiser to say nothing. He snapped the camera shut, and waited for Bulupo's return. Come what might, he was going to have his pictures.

"Lookit," said Jane suddenly, "I never heard you make no promises about the boy. That dago bloke, he'd make them and break them like making piecrust; but you—" Jane's deep voice faltered a little. It had been hard for her to see Junia make hot running these two days. "You," she went on, "don't tell lies. What do you reckon you're going to do?"

Cornered, Lombard replied plainly: "Take him with us. If you understood —if you dreamed—of his importance from a scientific point of view—"

"Yes, I know," Jane rapidly answered. "I know all about them monkeys that you says was your grandfathers and mine. God help you for saying it, though you don't believe in no gods. I reckon well you'll get it all the hotter by and by. Jingoes, Lombard, you're like them doctors that kills dogs, and says it's all for their good and because of science. When you're a man, you're bonzer, and I don't care what little tart hears me say it; but when you're a scientific bloke, you're—"

LOMBARD was never to hear what Jane thought of him, as a man of science. A shriek from the lagoon brought her speech to a premature end.

"Something's got him," she said, suddenly cool. She ran toward the water's edge. Bulupo, wailing, sat in the shallow water, holding up one leg. Other natives were running toward him; they cried out as they ran, and the language they used was not, this time, English.

"Wha—wha—what's they saying?" gasped Vasco, who had come up at the double, and was suffering for it.

Jane, walking deliberately into the warm water, said: "They're saying, 'It's the Star of Death.'"

"What's that?"

Bulupo had ceased crying out; he was sitting quite still, holding out and curiously regarding one lean leg, the leg was marked with several deep punctures, from which blood was slowly trickling.

Jane answered: "You scientific blokes ought to know. It's a pink-and-white starfish; and if it stings you, you die."

"There's no such creature in New Guinea," Lombard stated.

"Didn't I was telling you they got all the strangest things in this country?" Vance yelled. "Lombard, you—"

Lombard intervened. "I've heard of it in the central Pacific. It's very rare, and hasn't been studied."

"Too right it hasn't. But Jack, he knew about it, and Jack learned me," Jane declared. "That boy will die for certain; the natives thinks there's no cure for it."

Vasco was on her in a flash. "But you know there is. Mrs. Jane, you'll tell me —you couldn't be so cruel as not to tell."

JANE said, speaking like one in a dream: "That boy will go home, and lie down; he won't suffer. But he'll just wink out, quiet. And they'll take him, quiet, and bury him under one of them big palms near the sea. And he'll lie there listening to the tide on the reef, and the talkin' of them palms above him, and nobody won't come looking at him, and nobody'll disturb him, not till the Last Day."

"Mrs. Jane!" Vasco howled. "Mrs. *Jane!*"

Lombard put his hand on her arm. "Jane—will you save him?" Jane pulled away from him, looked once at Bulupo, who had wandered drunkenly out on to the sand.

"I won't," she said.

Lombard struck his hands together. "Lord," he cried, "that anyone could be so—"

"Is your cure a sure one?" Junia suddenly asked. Jane answered her without looking at her. "Sure as death—or life," she told the girl. She was watching Bulupo.

"Is it in your store?"

Jane was silent. If she didn't tell,—if she declared that she had been lying, and that there was no cure for the sting of the deadly creature,—Bulupo would peacefully pass away, as she had wished him to do.

The fish was rare in Papua, little known; the natives there had never heard of a cure for the sting. In the Tongan Islands, where Jack once had lived,—Jack, who had told her all about it,—the fish was common, and the cure common knowledge. But nobody else here knew of that. If she chose to say there was no cure, all evidence would be with her. And on Nor'west Island, life and death were cheap. So cheap that Jane herself had never been able to rate them very highly.

The minute passed.

"Lombard," said Nor'west Jane, "do you give me your word not to take him away if I save him?"

"All right," Lombard gave in grudgingly, "I promise."

AFTERWARD, Jane was never able to remember just what it was that moved her to act as she did. Bulupo was leaning backward, now, very quiet; his eyes were beginning to close.

Jane glanced once at Vasco, once at Lombard, who looked as if he would have liked to wring his hands, if only his dignity as a man of science had allowed. Then, short-skirted, cool, she stepped into the bright green water, holding a stick in her hand. On the tip of it, carefully, she lifted a starfish, a beautiful thing, pink-and-white, like a carved toy wrought of ivory and coral. Vasco gave a yell of horror; Lombard started forward.

And then Nor'west Jane took three quick steps, caught Vasco with a sudden inexorable grip and spoke: "This here starfish can sting twice," she told the terrified Levantine. "And one twitch of my hand will put it on you. Will you sign a court-of-law contract to leave that poor freak in peace here he's at home?"

"Yes," squealed Vasco. "I'll sign—anything."

"Lombard's witness," said Jane. And with that she released Vasco, walked over to the native with the starfish still dangling from the stick, and laid it underside down on the native's leg, where a few dark spots of blood marked the injury. The starfish, with its poisonous spines erect, curled its five fronds round the limb and clung tightly. You could see that the suckers on the white underside had taken hold, that they were drawing the poison out, acting like tiny cupping-glasses on the skin.

"That's the cure," said Jane. "It draws till it begins to loosen, and then you can knock it off with a stick."

"Keep it on," excitedly ordered Vasco. "Maybe you'll see different when—"

Jane silently held up her hand. The relatives of the boy were gathering round. From the throats of the women came a low, moaning cry.

"I reckon," Jane said, turning away, "we're too late."

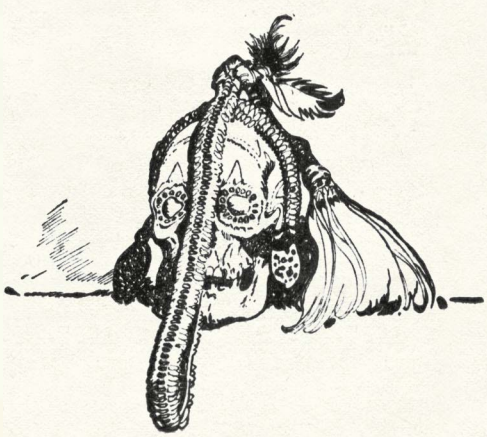
Even as she spoke, the starfish loosed its hold of the dead boy, and dropped upon the sand. Lombard lifted it on the point of his stick, and flung it far away. Then he bent over the body, examining it with professional skill.

"Gosh," said Junia, recovering herself quickly (she had turned very pale at the sight of this swift death), "that was a near thing. Look at Father. I think he's going to cry."

Jane had walked away from the rest of the party, mortifyingly sure that she had alienated Lombard for good by her sudden burst of savagery (but "Jings," she said to herself, "how could I let that poor devil be taken?") found him unexpectedly at her elbow.

"You'll have to forgive me, Jane," he said. "All of us, for that matter. We were wrong, and you were right, though I'm sure it would not have made much difference. The poor devil was far gone with disease and would never have stood a long journey. That's why the poison killed him so quickly, I suppose."

Jane said, suddenly, turning away her head, "How much do you reckon is the fare to Chicago?"



A Million for John

The ninth month of that hectic year in which a young man backed himself to make a million dollars through the exercise of "Personal Mystery."

By FULTON GRANT

The Story Thus Far:

"PERSONAL MYSTERY," said the wealthy manufacturer Ephraim Brood to Bentley Dewert, "is the secret of worldly success. Personal mystery made the sailor *Edmond Dantes,* in 'The Count of Monte Cristo,' over into the magnificent *Monte Cristo.* Let people *imagine* things about him. Didn't talk about himself. Lawrence of Arabia was another: an able and daring officer, yes; but personal mystery made him a world figure."

"Very interesting, Mr. Brood," said Dewert—who had been fired from his newspaper job and was hunting for another. "But how does it concern me?"

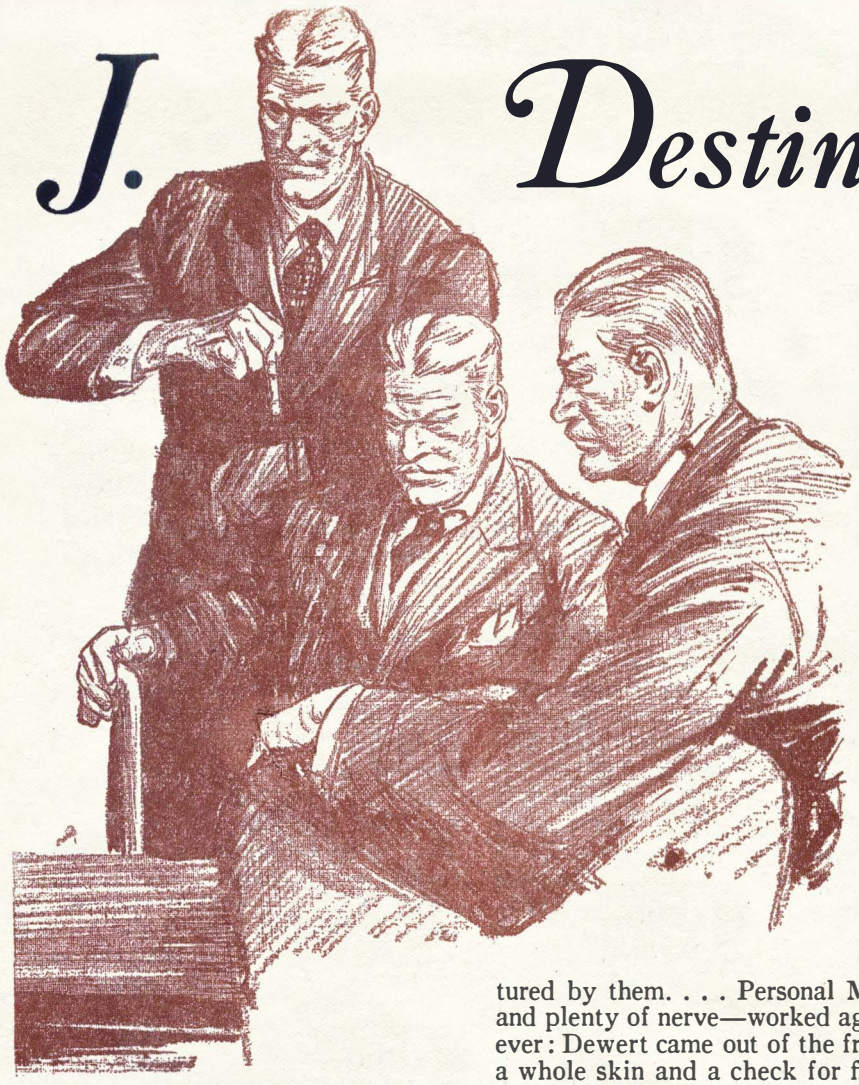
"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-*actor*. I'm going to write a book. Going to give my formula to the world. Need a stooge—somebody to *live* that book. While I write it! That's your job. You'll make a million dollars. Want the job?"

Dewert accepted the fantastic offer. With the five hundred dollars capital Brood provided, he bought new clothes, put up at the fashionable Washington Towers—and bribed the clerk *not* to let another guest, a French airplane-buyer, know that he, John Destiny (that was the stage name he had chosen) was in residence. The hotel-clerk promptly tipped off the newspaper men—and before the dust settled, a certain airplane-manufacturer had paid Mr. Destiny six thousand dollars to keep away from the airplane buyer.

Personal mystery worked even in hard-boiled Wall Street too. And it worked in the promotion of a fuel-saving invention. Personal mystery won him a huge sum for a month's work in advertising a mineral water. And personal mystery, plus the capital he'd acquired, enabled him to make a killing in the matter of a mercury-ore mine.

In another quarter, however, Dewert ran into trouble. One night he was great-

J. Destiny



ly taken by a pretty girl dining with an old gentleman in the Towers restaurant, and was wondering what sort of personal mystery he could employ to make her acquaintance, when the old fellow choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley took them to his rooms, called a doctor, and politely left them alone. When he returned, they had gone, leaving no word.

The newspapers soon supplied the answer: Lorraine Graymaster had aided her wealthy aged uncle to escape from the asylum in which, she believed, he had been unjustly confined; and the two had disappeared.

They got in touch with Dewert again, however; and he learned that Graymaster's supposed insanity was based on his knowledge of a certain paralyzing light-ray which would be of the utmost value in war. Bentley was able to save Graymaster from a gang of foreign conspirators determined to get possession of the old man's secret, but was himself captured by them. . . . Personal Mystery—and plenty of nerve—worked again, however: Dewert came out of the fracas with a whole skin and a check for fifty thousand dollars. But later the taste of success turned bitter in his mouth: Lorraine Graymaster, believing him responsible for the coupling of her name with his in certain fantastic newspaper stories, refused to have anything further to do with him. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THE price of fame is a great loneliness, it is said; and certainly Bentley was beginning to find this true. Becoming overnight a sort of wonder-boy, miracle-man and darling of a national press, involves handicaps and unpleasantnesses which most of us scarcely suspect; and there were moments, in the two weeks subsequent to his selling of the mercury lease to John Sindlon, Jr., in which he heartily wished he were back again in the comparative peace of Miss Rylan's boarding-house, with only the concern of getting a job lucrative enough to pay his weekly board-bill.

It was the daily press, of course, which had started the ball rolling. One cannot,

these days, dispose of a lease on the only source of quicksilver not controlled by allegedly aggressive powers or reserved for Uncle Sam's private consumption, without creating news. And when that act of disposal is tinctured with a considerable sum of money (even though the exact figures never leaked out) the news is the more newsy. Like murder or the secret amours of a society deb, such things will out. Will and did. And so within three days after Bentley's interview with Mr. John Sindlon, Jr., in Jo Caddis' office, he awoke to find himself a celebrity. The notoriety of the White Knight days had been transmuted to real fame.

BUT it did not end there. Ephraim Brood, for example, had complicated matters in his own inimitable way.

"What d'I tell you, boy?" he snorted when Bentley made his report upon the progress of his adventures at the Methuselah Society. "Personal Mystery's a wonderful thing, boy. Now you got half your million, that's what. You got big capital. You got to put your capital to work. Money makes money. Personal Mystery helps it do it. Get the idea, boy?"

Bentley did, somewhat vaguely. But Brood had more up his sleeve.

"Now you go out and get yourself a big office. Big one, mind. None of your little secondhand joints on Pine Street. Got to put up a front, boy. You get you an office in a fine new building. Plenty space. Never know what's going to turn up, now you've got capital. Got to be ready for it. That's all, boy. Go get your office and sit in it. Let the newspapers work for you now. People will come like flies around a sugar-bowl. Something's bound to happen."

All of which proved prophetic indeed.

Bentley got his office—a rather showy affair in a fashionable uptown skyscraper, with vast empty rooms which could have housed a staff of more than one hundred employees. He installed himself in a properly appointed private sanctum which gave on an anteroom. He hired a colorless young woman named Miss Spines to act as a buffer between himself and the outer world, and let Personal Mystery take its course. Which it did rapidly.

They came in droves. They thronged; they crowded; they piled; they amassed. They came with impressive documents of recommendation. Some "recalled the days when you were just a youngster in the old home town." (The "home town" was any unlikely spot between Walla Walla and Hohokus.) Others just came with little subterfuge.

Job-seekers, money-grubbers, shysters, salesmen, charity-workers, religious and benefit societies, would-be valets, confidence-men, bankers, brokers, aldermen and hopeful biographers poured in.

On the twentieth day of March, a Saturday, he had just completed his first experimental two weeks in his new offices. It was a day of slightly less pressure than past days. Perhaps the money-hounds had concluded that the week-end was not propitious to their needs.

And so, just before noonday, Bentley was able (after Miss Spines had closed the door upon three welfare workers, a would-be promoter of a sailless sailboat, an inventor of a threadless sewing machine, and a fellow who had an Arizona gold mine for sale at cut-rate prices), to sit back in his chair and to enjoy a moment of comparative peace.

He picked up the newspapers which lay piled, and still unread, on his desk. They were, he observed, still at it. Although he had refused interviews and had treated reporters with a cavalier disrespect, in order to discourage the almost fantastic myths which the press was engendering about him, the papers still carried his name in headlines, largely written out of pure imagination: "Tycoon Destiny Refuses Interview" . . . "Modern Crœsus Denies He's Lucky" . . . "Great Wealth Not His Aim, Says New York's Mushroom Millionaire" . . . "Destiny Proves no Sucker" . . . "White Knight Eschews Gags."

THUS ran the headlines; and in the columns that followed them Bentley was mildly amused to discover that the more they printed, the more they seemed to convince themselves, and therefore the reading public, that the young John Destiny's fortune should be mentioned not in mere millions but in cold tens of millions of dollars.

"What a laugh!" he reflected. "Give the papers a little molehill, and they'll make a mountain every time. If they only knew that I've got something just a little more than five hundred thousand dollars, in all, they'd pan me the way they always did before. Brood's Personal Mystery seems to work all by itself if you let it alone. The poor fools!"

At length, however, his mood changed. The first fun of reading grandiloquent

misstatements concerning himself began to pall. He fingered idly through the papers, letting his mind drift, half disturbed by the rhythmic tapping of Miss Spines' typewriter in the anteroom as she wrote endless letters to endless demands upon his supposed wealth, politely but firmly saying no to each one.

Suddenly a name flashed in his eyes. It brought him up stiffly to attention. He stared at the headline and gave a little gasp of interest. The line read:

GRAYMASTER FREE: DECLARED COMPETENT
HIGHER COURT REVERSES OLD DECISION

And there followed a brief account of how Dr. Buntsman Graymaster, wealthy eccentric, who had been for five years confined in the Mt. Hemon Asylum, had finally been released as a supreme court judge had ruled him sane in a hearing brought about by the efforts of the doctor's pretty niece, Lorraine. All in all, it was not a pleasant story. While the paper was cautious in its language, it was made perfectly clear for those who had eyes to read things left unsaid, that Dr. Graymaster's confinement had been brought about by a family too zealous concerning the considerable wealth of this old gentleman who stubbornly refused to die and leave it to them.

But the newspaper story contained another note, which gave Bentley a vague sense of loss, a feeling of deprivation. It was contained in the words:

> Friends of Doctor Graymaster, interviewed at the trial, spoke emphatically in praise of the devoted loyalty of Lorraine Graymaster, the Doctor's niece, whose unceasing activity was responsible for the bringing about a new opening of this *cause célèbre*. . . . The release of Dr. Graymaster from confinement recalls the rather astonishing adventures of this popular society girl who aided the wealthy eccentric to make an escape from Mt. Hemon in guise of a woman some months ago, and was in legal tangles herself as a result of it. Had not the patent-medicine millionaire returned to the hospital of his own accord, it is probable—

You couldn't, of course, laugh that off. "That girl has all the stuff," was Bentley's unspoken comment. "But I wish to heaven she didn't think me so low she refuses even to speak to me. I wish—"

He never quite completed that wish, for the mechanical Miss Spines interrupted his musings with her entry into his office, holding out a slim card.

"More of the same, sir," she said; and it was evident that Miss Spines thought not too highly of her employer's stream of visitors. Bentley glanced at the card and swore mildly under his breath. It read, cryptically, grandiloquently:

Jeff Davis Kelsdro: Cotton

The sight of it inflamed a brief resentment in Bentley. Who the devil was this Kelsdro? Why Cotton? Another trick, another dodge to wangle some of his supposed wealth away from him. Or a charity, perhaps. Or some Cause. His distrust and dislike of "causes" stimulated him to rise from his seat and stride toward the door with bitter and caustic words of dismissal on his tongue.

But he was faintly disconcerted when, instead of seeing only Mr. Jeff Davis Kelsdro, Cotton, in singular person, sitting in his anteroom, he saw precisely three of him. There were, at least, three men there—three with a single face. For although their garb was various and their statures different, it would have required almost superhuman perception to have chosen, among those astonishing gentlemen, one from another, so close was their resemblance. However, Bentley was determined to nip in the bud any further claimants upon the mythical millions accorded him by the press.

He said: "Which of you gentlemen is Mr. Kelsdro? Because it will save a lot of time if I tell him right away that the answer is no."

ALL three gentlemen arose, all three faces—identical, to his eye,—stared at him with astonishment. Only one, however, replied.

"We are all Kelsdros, suh—all Kelsdros from Ca'lina. I take it that you've not ve'y well understood about us, suh. I must urge you, suh, to reconsidah your preliminary negative, suh. We've come a mighty long ways for the privilege of makin' your acquaintance, suh—that is, if you're Mistuh Destiny, suh. Permit me to present the Ca'lina Kelsdros, suh. I'm Jeff Davis. Cotton's my business. Yonder's my brothah Calhoun, a shippin' man. And right there's my other brothah, Congressman Judah Lee Kelsdro, suh. We don't resent your misunderstandin', suh; the fault is ouah own. But it'll be a grand privilege to have the pleasure o' placin' ouah project before you—in private, suh. If you'd be so kind—"

It was a speech to turn away irritation and wrath. It carried a laurel branch,

and the white dove of peace hovered over the Kelsdro heads as each one bowed deeply at the mention of his name. It left Bentley without adequate rebuttal. Indeed, so surprising was this parley, that he heard his own voice say, as though without the volition of his mind:

"Won't you—step inside, gentlemen?"

They did. They marched through his door as though they had practiced a routine. Jeff Davis was the tall one. Calhoun was squat but sizable. Judah Lee was small, lean, mincing, immaculate, but quite unmistakably Kelsdro too. He, if possible, possessed a certain quality of greater dignity, albeit dignity seemed to be deeply emblazoned upon the escutcheons of the Ca'lina Kelsdros. Dignity and rather stilted speech.

YET when they were seated once more, Jeff Davis Kelsdro, apparently their spokesman, evidenced an ability to be blunt if not pointed.

"I'm a cotton man, Mistuh Destiny," he repeated, and went on: "And I make a quick bargain in spot, suh. In a word it's a sizable sum of money we Kelsdros want. Sizable sum, suh. A round million dollahs."

Bentley stared. His earlier irritation was reawakened. "You do?" he said. "You and some ten thousand others, apparently, gentlemen! I've been turning people away in droves—people who wanted money. I believe I began this interview with the statement that my answer would be no."

"We can't take that fo' an answer, suh. Not before you've heard us out."

And three Kelsdro heads shook to negate the mere possibility of such a thing.

"Well," said Bentley, "I'm listening."

It was Congressman Judah Lee Kelsdro who took up the business now, in his best Congressional manner. His accent, though bearing traces of Ca'lina, was less markedly Southern; his method more pointed.

"We presume, suh, that you are aware that one of our great national problems is overproduction of cotton."

"I've read things to that effect in the papers," Bentley said with some truth. "But economics is not in my line."

Kelsdro seemed not to hear this last.

"Very good, suh. It is a fact, that the Gov'ment has paid us Southern cotton-growahs eight-point-three cents a pound to keep excess cotton off the market. They call it a loan, suh, but it amounts to a subsidy. As Congressman, suh, I am sponsor of a bill which will dispose of this surplus. There are eleven million bales in that frozen stock, suh—a tremendous amount. This last year is the worst export year in ouah history—barely one hundred and fifty million dollars sold overseas. If we fix the exports, suh, we save the situation. That's where my bill comes in."

"And where do I come in, if at all?"

"I'm comin' to that, suh. My brothah, hyah, is president of an important cotton growers' association—my brothah Jeff Davis. My other brothah, bein' a shippin' man, supplies the export feature, suh. That bill's a Kelsdro bill, all round, you can see, suh."

"Just what does it propose?"

"Trade excess cotton against Europe's excess rubbah stocks. England, fo' instance, needs ouah cotton, with war loomin' on the horizon. We need England's rubbah. We've got a hundred million bushels wheat, too, suh, which the Government has bought just as they bought cotton. Europe needs that wheat, suh. That's in my bill too, suh."

"Interesting, gentlemen; but I still don't see why you come to me."

The third Kelsdro spoke then.

"Because you have got money, suh."

"I gathered it had something like that in it; but just what angle of cotton involves my money?"

"Not cotton, suh. That's wheah I come in. If Judah Lee's bill becomes a law, suh, it's the shippin' angle that's big. We Kelsdros have money. We like money. Money makes the world a brighter place, suh. When it comes to money, we aim to act togethah, suh. A shippin' man, I see big money in transpo'tin' cotton an' wheat across the Atlantic. Somebody's got to do it; why not the Kelsdros, suh?"

"You mean you want to build a shipping line to carry this cotton and stuff in case that bill of your brother's becomes a law?"

"No suh, not build: charter. I can lay my hands on a right spanky li'l' fleet o' freighters. With my brothah in Washin'ton, him bein' a right smart man wheah Kelsdros is concerned, an' my othah brothah bein' head o' that cotton-growahs' league, an' me with a fleet o' ships flyin' an American flag, it's a right smart set-up for money-makin', suh. All we need is capital. You've got that, suh."

"Hm-m-m!" murmured Bentley. "I think I catch on. So you want me to supply the capital."

"That's dead right, suh."

Ephraim Brood was short. "You're crazy, boy," he said. "I won't finance a speculation for you!"

"And why *me?* Don't you have any money, you Kelsdros? And if it's such a good business, why not go to a bank?"

Judah Lee Kelsdro caught that one.

"We *are* a bank, suh. Down in Ca'lina in the town o' Sedgeway, the Kelsdro bank is a known institution, suh. Besides, we don't aim to give you all the control, Mistuh Destiny. There's Kelsdro money goin' in this proposition—half a million, suh. But 'twouldn't do at all if it leaked out that the Kelsdros were swingin' this deal, suh. As a Congressman, suh, 'twould be right embarrassin' for me, sponsorin' that bill *and* takin' a profit on it, besides. You can see that, suh. That's why we come to you. You don't have no political ties, suh. You aint mixed up in cotton. We was aimin' to be silent partners in the deal, suh. We'll pay dollah fo' dollah, alongside your money. You can find out about us Kelsdros, Mistuh Destiny. We got a name—a right good name, too. But we need a million dollars more than we've got handy, to swing this deal."

"WHAT makes you think I've got a million dollars?" Bentley asked, for it seemed high time to bring this up. The Kelsdros answered him with a trio of knowing smiles, and Jeff Davis Kelsdro voiced the family opinion with:

"Accordin' to the papers, suh, you've got mighty near a billion. We don't believe that. But we reckon it's safe to bet you've got at least ten per cent of what the papers say you have. Besides, we've heard about you, suh. Senator Pinkton nevah gets tired tellin' how you refused a million-dollah job, suh. Folks who don't have real money don't refuse jobs like that."

"You've talked with Senator Pinkton?"

" 'Twas his talkin' that give us the idea, suh. Now if you'll be so kind as to let my brothah explain about those ships, I reckon you'll see things ouah way."

"I'd like," said Bentley, "to hear all of it."

So Calhoun Kelsdro launched the tale.

It was a good tale. It had real merit. As the Southerner outlined it, its possibilities grew in Bentley's mind. Here, at last, was his one big chance. Brood's wildest promises had apparently come true. The possession of money will bring more money; and now at last money was in hot pursuit of him. Or so it seemed, as the Kelsdros outlined their plan.

Calhoun Kelsdro, the "shippin' man," was a man of parts, of substance, of experience. For many years he had operated a small fleet of coastwise vessels which handled a considerable portion of Southern cotton destined for New England spinning and milling. He admitted, frankly, that his coastal vessels were not fit for transatlantic service, and that in order to take advantage of the projected opportunity of sending that vast store of Government-subsidized cotton across the water, he would need bigger, more seaworthy ships. To build such a fleet in time to capture the Government charter against competition would be out of the question, both from a financial viewpoint and from that of time.

But through his contacts in the shipping world he had learned that a certain South American republic had made an abortive effort to enter into the world-competition in merchant-shipping. They had purchased five brand-new ships of seven thousand tons each and had placed orders for more from Smythe and Withie of Glasgow, only to find that they could not compete with the English, Dutch and German bottoms. These ships, it seemed, were available for charter, although the fact was not yet public; and it was upon these South American ships that the Kelsdro profit-sharing scheme (their own name for it!) had been founded. In brief, the Kelsdros could lay half a million dollars on the line, if some other person—Bentley, in this case—could and would lay down the other half. A closed corporation was to be formed, using the name of the fourth party (John J. Destiny) and omitting any indication of Kelsdro interest.

CERTAINLY this was far removed from the get-rich-quick schemes which had been pouring into his office during the past two weeks, and Bentley's active interest was a natural one. But he remained cautious.

"There seem to be two things wrong with your plan, gentlemen," he told them when the shipping man had finished. "The first is that a bill before the House, as I understand it, must first pass the House, then the Senate, and have the President's signature, before becoming a law. It appears that the chances of the average bill are pretty small."

"Not this one!" This was Jeff Davis. "I'm a modest man, suh; but I'm fo'ced to admit that my bill has every chance of becomin' law. Politics is politics, suh. They's more to politics than meets the eye, suh."

"I'm sure there is," said Bentley. "But there's another thing, too. Suppose your bill passes: What reason have I to expect that we could be assured of Government—ah—favoritism in getting the bulk of those shipments against competition? It amounts to that, doesn't it?"

"I dislike the wo'd, suh; but the meaning is right similar. In politics we don't employ the wo'd *fav'ritism.* We prefer to say 'recognition fo' services rendered.' And assumin' my bill passes, which it will, we can assume that my brothah Judah Lee's services rendah'd to that cotton league will be sufficient to command recognition, suh."

There was, Bentley saw, a certain logic in the whole thing. Just how influential the Kelsdro family was in matters of political nature, he could not know. But it did seem likely that, should the Kelsdros themselves be willing to risk a half million dollars out of their own pocket, they must be pretty confident of the outcome. However, none of this was the kind of thing at which he had experience or competent knowledge, and his natural caution made him shy of any conclusive attitude.

Still, it was a big chance. Personal Mystery had made for him, in one way or another, half a million dollars. It had been a hectic business, however, and a great strain on his nervous system. Daily he had become more and more aware of the strain of gathering a considerable fortune, no matter how perfect the formula for it. Daily his sense of being a puppet, of losing track of his own identity, had grown in him. The beautiful picture which the Kelsdros painted for him promised one hundred thousand dollars a month for as long a term as the shipping enterprise should endure—for each faction of the new corporation, Kelsdro and Destiny. There was a certain open frankness about them, although their language was clouded with euphemisms. They did not seek to hide the fact that their set-up was purely political—not precisely dishonest, but definitely opportunist in its structure. They would,

furthermore, be investing money of their own. It did not have the ring of the age-old confidence game. Their error, he knew secretly, lay in their estimate of his wealth. Their very conservative reasoning had tripped them up. To be sure, they did not credit him with the fantastical millions which the press had so widely hinted at, but *merely* several millions. Whereas he, Bentley Dewert, knew that the John J. Destiny bank-account could show a scarce half million.

"That," he assured himself inwardly, "has all the elements of Personal Mystery; but hang it all, if it doesn't give me the million dollars they want, I don't quite see how it does me any good."

That, of course, was the point.

"Well, gentlemen," he said after some deliberation, "you can't expect a man to make up his mind on a million-dollar project in a couple of minutes. This can wait a little while. Suppose you keep in touch with me. I'll give you a definite answer when I've figured it out."

And the interview ended on that note.

EPHRAIM BROOD was short, loud and categorical.

"You're crazy, boy," he said, after Bentley had completed his long recitation. "I'm not in the speculation business. I'm employing you to do a job; you go and do it. I'll back you up when you need money. That's in our contract. But I won't finance a speculation for you! That's not Personal Mystery. That doesn't prove anything at all. You've got five hundred thousand dollars. That's fine. That's pretty good. But you need a million. Well, boy, you've got a million, and don't know it. You've got Personal Mystery, haven't you? Then go and use it. Off you go, boy. And don't come crying to me."

And that, very obviously, was that. Bentley left the soap company's offices with a slightly red face. It had been an impulse, merely that, to go to Brood. And a bad one, he knew. The old man was perfectly right. It was not his place to finance Bentley's schemes. His responsibility was limited to the barest essentials for carrying on the Personal Mystery experiment. That and no more.

Jo Caddis was as blunt or blunter than Ephraim Brood.

"So I should hand you five hundred grand, is that it?" he snorted. "Jeepers creepers, son, it aint only that you're dumb; you got delusions. Five hundred thousand bucks is big-league marbles. Listen, son, I hate to turn you down, see? Only, I got principles—"

"Principles? Now, listen, Jo—"

"Yeah, principles. Maybe I'm a promoter, hey? Maybe I take a sucker or two, when they wanna buy a couple gold bricks. But I got principles, jussa same. Principles says I should take care o' Jo Caddis. Nobody ever seen Jo Caddis lay down that much kale on anybody's line. I don't say that idea is such a bum one, neither; only it's got a' *if*. It's got a' big *if: If* that bill gets to be a law, and *if* your First Family boy-friends aint crooks, and *if*, when the law is passed, they can swing their little deal. Hell, no, son, I aint no politician. I aint no steamship man. I'm just a sucker-noose named Jo Caddis. Ever get your head examined, kid?"

And that was the end of that.

"Okay, Jo—skip it." Bentley started for the door in a cloak of gloom. This was a black moment. First Brood, then Caddis. Up to now things had been too easy for him. He had been forgetful of human nature, trusting in a formula. He had, for instance, forgotten to distinguish between the meaning of "friend" and that of "financier." And Caddis, after Brood, had given him a none-too-gentle reminder.

"Skip it, Caddis," he repeated morosely, now filled to bitterness with his new-learned knowledge of a sad old world. "Just forget it." Then he slammed the door behind him.

"TO hell with it. To hell with all of them. To hell with Personal Mystery, too. I'm finished—washed up."

These were the large black thoughts which welled up in Bentley's mind as he paced his hotel rooms that night. They were the more concrete expression of a feeling which, since seeing Brood and Caddis, had been growing speedily in Bentley. For he was human, and like humans, when secretly and deeply aware of his own blindness and ineptness to meet a situation, he found vent for that feeling by crying out against others, against Fate, against what sage Shakespeare mildly terms a "naughty world."

In his room, Bentley paced the floor without rest or thought of sleep, building air-castles out of the figmentary tissue which the Kelsdros had supplied, creating vast fleets of ships, seeing cotton-bales piled high, and bright dollars still higher, seeing himself at long last established in an important business, feel-

ing substantial and impervious to the worry of daily risk. Then the castles would come tumbling down into nothingness as the betraying wind of grim reality blew against them, and he would begin all over again. Walk, think; walk, think; pace, dream; pace, dream; dream crumble, dream crumble—not a healthful cycle, surely. And it ended in that frantic note of futility:

"To hell with it."

The next day was a black Sunday. The day went drearily past until the dinner hour. He went down to the grill. And whether by chance or by the manipulation of some compelling Providence, he found himself at the very table at which, just half a year earlier almost to a day, he had sat when he had his first vision of Lorraine Graymaster. How delightful she had looked—how he had dreamed of making her acquaintance!

And now, somehow and by some mysterious chemistry, that old feeling of happy-go-lucky determination to do things, which had sent him out after his million, was born again in him, as though that empty vision had engendered it.

"I'm being a fool," he told himself. "*She* didn't let things get in her way—just a sliver of a girl like that, too. She took a chance, getting her uncle out. She even took a chance with her life, dodging those devilish foreign agents. She wasn't afraid. I guess I've been spoiling myself. If I'm ever going to do anything *big*, I've got to do it right—on my own. Brood said it: I've got Personal Mystery on my side, why in blazes don't I use it? Bring on your Kelsdros."

Perhaps it was the excellence of the Washington Towers cuisine that did it. Perhaps it was this revivifying recollection. Perhaps it was only the Sisters

The voice was feminine: "The less we have to do with you, the better off we are."

Three, high in their Olympian cloud, plucking at the thread marked *Bentley Dewert* and weaving it into a newer, brighter pattern. Whatever the stimulus, Bentley left the Washington grill, a man renewed. For in that dinner-hour, an idea had been born.

TRUE, Bentley had seen New York on brighter mornings, but this one would do. Presumably the brightness came from within him, for in actual fact it was drizzling heavily and there was a faint threat of snow. But there was a pure sunshine in Bentley's heart as he strode by Radio City toward his office and contemplated Prometheus on his golden rock.

"Prometheus," he assured himself, "got out of a tough spot; why shouldn't I?"

And as he entered the vast marble portal of his building and marched toward the elevator: "So I will, by gosh!"

Was it possible that Miss Spines was greeting him with a smile? Was it possible that she had removed her thick glasses, had primped and powdered and done her best by such plain features as her Maker had given her? Was there a faint trill in her voice as she cooed:

"Well, good morning, Mr. Destiny! Aren't you a little early today?"

He was early. If there were worms to catch, Early Bird Dewert would catch them.

"This, Miss Spines," he announced sententiously, "is going to be a big day. I can feel it. So to begin with, just tell anybody who comes here except the Kelsdro brothers that I'm out. Tell 'em I'm dead—anything, only don't let 'em in."

And Miss Spines beamed at him—if a sharp hatchet can be said to beam.

For Bentley had equipped himself with a little more than mere determination.

He had concocted a plan—perhaps not precisely a plan, but at least a mode of procedure.

"Wonder why I didn't figure it out that way before," he mused. "I'm supposed to be a big-shot. The Kelsdros *think* I've got plenty of money. Big shots, especially those with money, are famous for not letting any of it get away from them. If they want to play make-believe with me, I'll play make-believe right back at 'em. That's Personal Mystery, isn't it? All I needed was the courage to *act* like a big-shot. Just watch my smoke, Dewert; keep your eye on young Kid Destiny."

All of which was very laudable, very fine, very inspiring. But there is a twist in us humans which is hard to control. We can get ourselves all worked up to a point of smart, definite action. But let some delay, some trivial insignificance postpone our action so carefully planned, and shunt our screwed-up courage, and we begin to deflate like an exhausted balloon.

Which was Bentley's sad experience.

For the day began to drag. Calls there were, visitors in streams and droves, all clamoring for an interview in which to subtract from the mythical fortune of New York's most fortunate young man; but there was no call nor visit from the Kelsdros. Ten-thirty, eleven, noon. . . . Still riding high on his new energy, Bentley sent Miss Spines for sandwiches, lest while he lunched, Opportunity should knock again and slip through his fingers. Two o'clock, three, four, four-thirty—still nothing of consequence, save a faint feeling of nausea that accompanies disappointment.

"I thought," Bentley told himself drearily, "they'd be eager to grab that million. I wonder what's—"

HIS incompleted sentence was broken by the sound of loud talking in Miss Spines' anteroom.

"Simply impossible—won't stand for it, sir. Not there, I tell you. Must be intoxicated to act like this—" That was Miss Spines shrilling a protest.

A man's caustic, irritated voice was barking in reply, and a heavy walking-stick was cracking on the floor as the door to Bentley's sanctum was flung violently open.

"Get out of my way, you, you—you young female! Officious young female! Don't you dare tell me your secretarial lies. Out. I say, or else mind your toes."

And a fiery old gentleman stormed through the door, slamming it emphatically upon the outraged Miss Spines and her protests.

He glared at Bentley, who stood gaping at him.

"Ha! Thought you were here all the time! Getting uppity with a little money; that's what you are, young man. Stop staring at me like a monkey. I'm here on business. Ha!"

"Why—why, Dr. Graymaster! What in the world—"

IT was indeed the eccentric Doctor, very able and active for his ancient years, and with all the ginger needed to give a somewhat formidable aspect to his wry Voltairian face.

"Well," he snapped, "where's your manners? If you've got any! Lorrie says you haven't. Why don't you ask me to sit down? I'm old enough to be your great-grandfather, boy."

Words finally came.

"But please do, sir," Bentley managed to say. "I—I—was so surprised to see you, I'm afraid—"

"Don't see why you'd be surprised. I'm out of that infernal hospital, am I not? You read the papers, don't you? You've been buttin' into my business enough, haven't you? Seems natural enough I'd butt into yours, Mister Billionaire Destiny. Ha!"

He stomped to a chair and creaked into it, thumping vigorously with his stick as he did so. Bentley found more words:

"I'm very glad to see you, sir," he said. "And of course I'm happy that—"

"Rot. Don't waste time on polite nothings, young feller. Don't need 'em. I'm here on business."

"Business?"

"That's what I said, didn't I? Read about you in the papers. Must be a lot of lies, but seems you've got money. I want some of it."

"Money, sir?" It seemed incredible. Buntsman Graymaster, rich as Crœsus himself, actually sitting there across his desk and announcing that he wanted money!

"But—but Dr. Graymaster, I—I had thought you were a very rich man. I didn't believe—"

"Who cares what you thought? Matter of fact, I'm rich enough, but that damned tribe of mine is trying to get it away from me again. Want to bring a new trial. Want to prove me crazy, so's they can have what I sweated for. I'll

see 'em in hell first. They've attached my bank-accounts. All of 'em. All my money is tied up in long-term bonds and real estate. Not liquid. Want cash. You've got it. So here I am."

It took Bentley several seconds to digest all this. It not only disconcerted him, but it almost frightened him a little. That the old man was serious, there could be no doubt. Furthermore, he seemed to recall something in the day's newspapers about the Graymaster family making a new attempt to get the old Doctor confined again. But really to believe that the notorious patent-medicine magnate, Lorraine's precious uncle, was actually sitting there and asking for a loan, was a feat as difficult as imagining Ephraim Brood in the same situation.

"But—but of course, sir. How much do you want?"

He had expected the Doctor, a man accustomed to large money, temporarily embarrassed, to name a good round sum, say five hundred or even a thousand. But he was unprepared for Graymaster's answer.

"One hundred thousand dollars, young man. I want to start a manufacturing plant."

BENTLEY gasped. This was Lorraine Graymaster's uncle, nobody else, sitting across his desk and asking for one hundred thousand dollars!

"A hundred thousand!" he got out.

The Doctor nodded.

"Call it an investment. You're in this, young feller. I'm going to manufacture that light of mine. Going to give it to Uncle Sam, whether his demned ordnance department wants it or not. Takes money to build a manufacturing plant."

How could he refuse Lorraine's uncle? In a subtle way, this was blackmail—unknowing blackmail, of course, because the old Doctor couldn't know how he, Bentley, felt inside. But if he should give away one hundred thousand—when he himself was frantically needing five times that much to accomplish a dream of pure gold, an opportunity which might never return—

He stalled for time.

"Your light, sir? I—I don't understand very much about that. I know there was some kind of light, and that it had some military value, and that some foreigners were trying to grab it, but—"

"Ha! Went around playing Galahad for my niece and didn't even know what it was about! Ha! Bah!"

"I'm afraid that's true, sir. You see, it was only by accident that I—"

"Well, it's no accident now. Business, this is. Now you listen, young feller. Only, first I want your promise to keep this a secret. You and my niece are the only persons in the world who know just what I've got—if I tell you. Besides, it's dangerous. They'd kill you to get it out of you. You know who I mean?"

"I'll risk it," Bentley said. "You mean the lad who calls himself Ross and that one-eyed foreign murderer."

GRAYMASTER gave him a quick, penetrating look, and shook his head slowly, gravely.

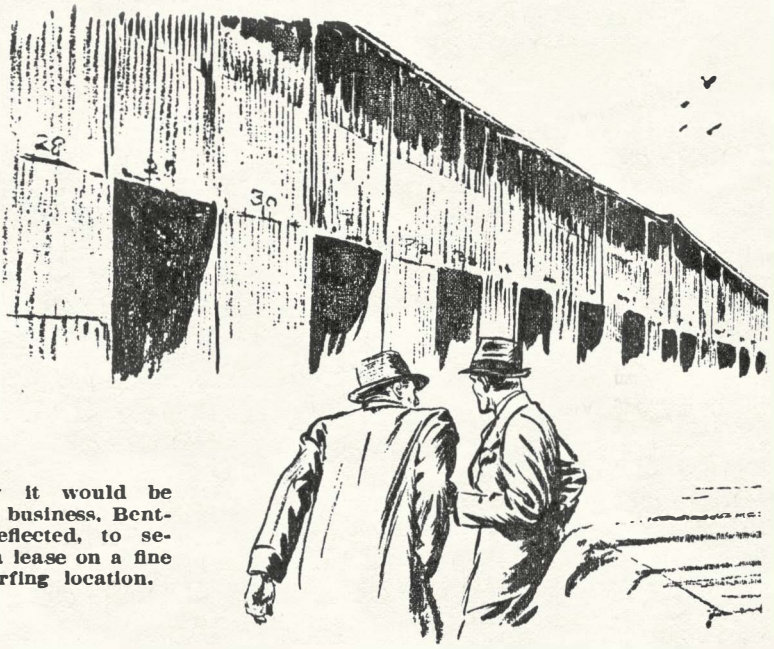
"It's amazing," he said, "how a lad like you can make a fool of himself. But listen: That light of mine is potentially the most perfect defensive weapon of war in the world. It is so powerful that it produces blindness for a minimum of six hours after the eye has been exposed to it for only one second, or at a distance of as much as a mile from the source. Didn't mean to create a weapon. That was an accident. I was looking for a means of producing light at the lower end of the ultraviolet position in the spectrum, when I stumbled on it. Had sun-lamps in mind. Experimenting with different metals in carbon composition. Tried about everything. Wanted to produce a cheap lamp which was effective, which everybody could buy and use. Used the electric arc, of course. Then one day, using a new metallic element in my carbons, I made a light so powerful it blinded me. Half a million candlepower or so, plus a kind of nerve-paralyzing effect upon the eye. Blind for nearly a day. Went back to it. Did it again, this time protecting my eyes. Blinded just the same. Noticed that blindness departed and left the eyes well. Wrote an article about it in a medical journal. That's where they first saw it."

"Just who are *they,* sir, if you don't mind telling me?"

"Ha! Don't mind? Of course I mind! But I've got to chance it. You've got to know. If you go partners with me in this thing, young feller, your life may not be worth a nickel. Never hear of the Carpathian Union?"

"Not that I remember."

"Ha! Demned bunch of madmen. Balkan states, of course. Five little countries linked together in a half-secret agreement. None are big, but together they take in quite a chunk of Europe."



Surely it would be smart business, Bentley reflected, to secure a lease on a fine wharfing location.

"Dictator countries?"

"Ha! Yes and no. They are, but they don't know it. That's the trouble. Long ago, those five countries were one—united under Charlemagne back in the year 800 or somewhere. Split up when Hapsburgs dominated Europe. Later they were both German and Russian. . . . You know the story. Then the Treaty of Versailles split them up again into five so-called democracies with an eye to breaking up the imperial idea in Europe—like Czechoslovakia, ha! But recently, with two dictators waving swords, and the League of Nations just a club for old men, and things like the Munich business, and the Czechs being quartered, these little countries have formed a league—against the possibility of being chewed up by the dictators. Carpathian Union, ha! That's what *they* think."

HE paused there; then:

"But they're being fooled. There's more to it."

"More, sir?" Bentley had forgotten his own problem in the fascination of the old man's stories.

"Lot more. Fellow named Karlovy—Francin Yrgen von Karlovy, to give him his right name, archduke of Carpathia, so he calls himself, and maybe he's not so far wrong. He's your one-eyed gentleman. Ha!"

"His Highness?"

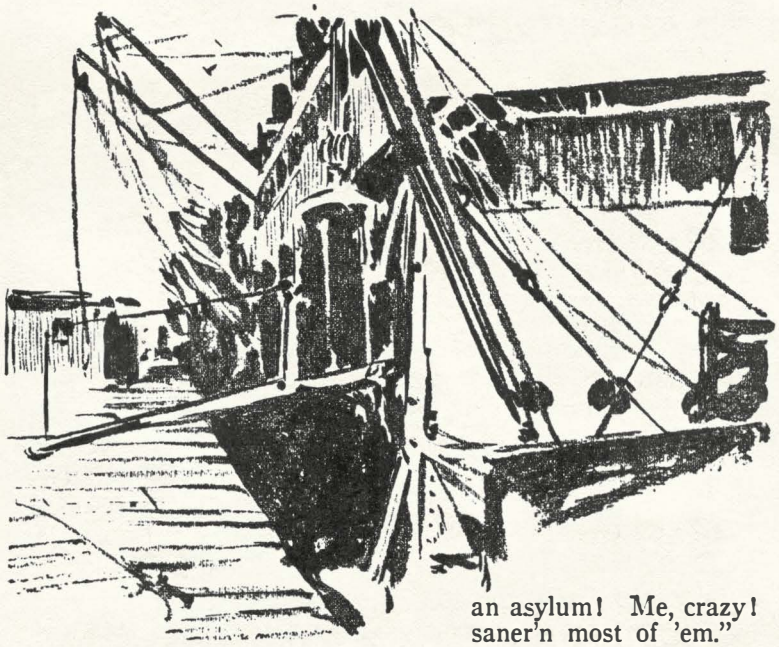
"Ha! They call him that. He calls himself that. He suffers from the same delusions that fill asylums with men who think they're Napoleon. Demned maniac—dementia præcox with a megalomania. Now you listen, young feller, and I'll tell you about him. Ha!"

Bentley did listen, and he heard a story which might have been straight from a Dumas novel.

KARLOVY, it seemed, could really trace his ancestry back to one of Charlemagne's viceroys; but he was an opportunist, a fanatical madman who, seeing certain of the Balkans threatened by the warring dictators, proclaimed himself a sort of savior, uniting those little nations into a holy league—with himself, naturally, at their head. Posing as a patriot, and having a personality which caught up the imagination of his people, he had won considerable—if unofficial—power. He had served in the Kaiser's army as a colonel, and had a considerable ability in matters of war. He had also, in his youth, studied medicine and maintained a sort of hobby interest in world developments along medical lines, which was how he happened to read of Dr. Graymaster's discovery of a new and very powerful light. But his warped mind saw in it only military possibilities.

"He sent this fellow Ross—Baron von Rossenisch, his real name is—to me, and made me an offer for my formula of mixing that metallic element with carbon in the arc. I refused him, of course. I wasn't interested in things military. Then Karlovy himself came over and offered me a cold million dollars. I refused again. My life and liberty has been in danger ever since."

"I have a pretty good idea about that," said Bentley.



"But," the Doctor went on, "realizing that the military value of a light so powerful it would blind an attacking army at a distance, or put a squadron of airplanes out of business by blinding their pilots, I felt it my duty to give it to our own Government. I gave a demonstration at Washington with one of my small units—a crude but quite powerful little thing which operated on a six-volt storage battery. Ha!"

The wizened little face scowled. He spat an oath.

"But this country was in the throes of peace-propaganda then. Wanted to disarm. Sending men to sit in conference at Geneva. Administration didn't dare buy anything or adopt anything openly which could be called armament. Ordnance Department officers were stupid, blind, antiquated. Bah! They sent me away with a lot of condescending poppycock. Didn't want to make money on the demned thing. Got plenty money. But it costs money to develop the powerful apparatus the army would need—money and expert engineering. I'm a chemist, not a manufacturer. My interest in the demned thing was purely therapeutic, ha! Made me mad. Also gave this demned Karlovy another chance at me. I'd have sold the demned thing out, too, if I hadn't discovered that he had ideas of making himself a ruler of Europe. Using that light *offensively*, and not defensively, a country could win any war—with practically no bloodshed. But I turned Karlovy down again, and just about that time that demned tribe of mine got ideas about railroading me into an asylum! Me, crazy! Demned sight saner'n most of 'em."

"I would certainly say so, sir."

"Who cares what you'd say? Do I get that money, or not?"

There it was again. Bentley had forgotten the purpose of this recitation in the fascination of the story, and now he was confronted with it again. How could he take a hundred thousand away from his small fortune? But—how could he refuse Lorraine's uncle?

He stalled again, ineffectually.

"Well, you see, sir, I—"

"Ha! Don't stall around with me, young puppy. You've got the money. I've got security. Either I get the money, or I don't. And if I don't, you're demned ungrateful. That light is your business in a way—saved your life once, didn't it?"

"Why, I—I didn't quite know—"

"Didn't know, didn't know! What'd you think it was, when they jumped me in the street? That smart niece of mine carried a miniature flash-arc. If she hadn't blinded those men, you'd never be the white-haired boy of the newspapers today. Blinded you too, didn't it? Got over it, didn't you? Best experiment in the world. Absolute proof. You ought to be first one to invest in me, young feller. Hundred thousand dollars, I need. In exchange, I'll give you title and deed to a tenement block over on First Avenue—worth a demsight more, too. Call me rich. I'm property-poor; that's what I am. But I'm a good business man. Know what I want. Pay what it's worth. Now, do I get that money?"

BENTLEY was shaking his head. It was hard to refuse, but he knew that he must. With the half million he had—

and some Personal Mystery—he had a slim chance of putting over the Kelsdros' deal. But with only four hundred thousand—

The telephone rang briskly. Bentley lifted the instrument.

"Hello," he said, glad of a moment's interruption.

The voice was feminine, liquid, silvery—but definitely antagonistic.

"This is Lorraine Graymaster. I don't want to talk to you; I want my uncle. I know he's there, so don't you give me any of your lies. And I don't want you interfering in our business. The less we have to do with you, the better off we are. Now you put him on the wire right off, and I'll try to forget I ever spoke to you."

Bentley did not hear the end of it. His face was white. His neck was red. His voice was hard when he said flatly into the transmitter:

"Sorry, madam. He's not here." And slammed down the instrument. He turned to Graymaster with a new, grimmer expression on his face, a new look of determination.

"All right, sir," he said shortly, "I'll do it. You can have the money right now, Doctor Graymaster."

THERE is something about a good, honest rage that clears the air and acts as a purgative to the spirit. All evening and all night Bentley had raged, and this morning he had made up his mind, once for all.

"What am I doing?" he asked himself. "Me, a two-bit newspaper man not even good enough to hold down a shipping job, acting as if I were a financier. It's ridiculous. What do I want with all that money, anyhow? More trouble than it's worth. It's given me a cockeyed slant on everything. Besides, that darned girl can't talk to me like that—"

And that was his mood as he stormed into his offices. The lobby, again, was full. Miss Spines was icily at work, dismissing the parasites; and Bentley marched through to his sanctum with no more than a nod to her, after observing that the Kelsdros were not among those waiting for him. He shut his door and his heart and his mind against them, against a whole world of them. He was through. He had some figuring to do, but he was substantially through—and glad of it. He would read his morning paper and then get to work, figuring just how much money he would give back to its original source—a sort of debt of honor—and how much he would turn over to Brood to cancel their agreement. But that wouldn't take long. He was through, in his heart, and enjoying it thoroughly. It was like a new freedom.

"Dammit, there are a lot of other women in the world. She can't push me around like that. What do I want with society debs, anyhow?"

And grimly he opened his paper.

The front page rose up and slapped him in his face. A headline blazed:

KELSDRO BILL PASSES HOUSE:
U. S. MAY EXPORT COTTON,
WHEAT ON BARTER BASIS

The House of Representatives passed the Kelsdro Cotton-Export bill yesterday with a two-thirds vote, putting a new light on the problem of disposing of our surplus stocks of 11,000,000 bales of cotton and some 150,000,000 bushels of excess wheat, a problem which has grown in increasing proportions for the last several months.

Should this Bill pass the Senate, as is considered probable in informed circles, it will mean that the surplus supplies of these two major staples which Uncle Sam has purchased at a nominal figure to keep them from lowering the market, will be traded abroad for rubber, tin and other stocks of which this country stands in need. . . .

And reading it, a great pain was born in Bentley's inmost soul.

"It would be like that," he almost wept. "Here I get myself all worked up to believe that I can get out from under the whole damned business, and then—oh, Lord, what a tangle! I start off one way, and then something pops, and I go another, and along comes something else and knocks me back again. Oh, well, I'm through now. But it's too bad—too bad. Those Kelsdro boys were really talking straight—"

"Mr. Destiny?" It was Miss Spines' voice.

"Yes," he said listlessly.

"The Kelsdro brothers to see you, sir. Shall I send them in?"

HE assented. Might as well face it now as later. Might as well get used to it. He was no longer New York's artificial billionaire, no longer anybody's anything—just another guy named Dewert, trying to get a job.

"Good mornin', suh." It was a chorus of Kelsdros. They came in, ranged like a trio of notes in an ascending scale, from

Judah Lee to Calhoun to Jeff Davis. "Good mornin', Mr. Destiny, suh. See you've read the good news, suh. We didn't aim to crowd you, suh, but when the Kelsdro Bill passed the House, it did seem like time to reopen ouah little business mattah, suh."

Bentley nodded, and waved them to seats.

"I'm afraid it's no use, gentlemen," he began, on the point of pouring out a sort of confession, of telling them that his entire structure and position in the world of wealth was a false one, without any foundation beyond the imagination of the press and a few luckless individuals. But Judah Lee caught him up.

"No use, suh? You don't mean that, suh. You cain't mean that, suh! I've done my part, suh. We Kelsdros have done ouah part, suh. That newspapah is proof, suh, that ouah intentions are absolutely hon'able and correc', suh. You cain't turn us down now, suh. You—"

"Sorry, gentlemen," Bentley said. "But I simply haven't the money. If I had the million dollars you want, gentlemen, I'd be glad to go in with you. But I just haven't it. I'm afraid the newspapers have made too much out of my small success. I—"

BUT the Kelsdros were not to be put off that way.

"We understand all that, suh," said Calhoun, the shipping man. "We counted on that, suh. You mean you cain't put your hands on a million dollahs, cash. Nobody can, suh. That's a powerful lot o' money, suh. We've been thinkin' this thing ovah these last fo'ty-eight houahs. We been thinkin' maybe, now that the bill's gone through the House, we could raise half that cash ouahse'ves. That would only leave you a half-million, suh, on the line, and we'd give you a controllin' interest against your unpaid balance until such a time you could liquidate enough of your holdin's to pay in the rest. We been thinkin' that's fair, suh. We don't want to embarrass you none, suh. But five hundred thousand's no big sum for a man like you, suh."

And there, squarely, it was.

Bentley gave an inward moan. Here, without any intent on his part, without any plan, without malice or design, he had said just the thing, done just the trick to create the very needed effect of Personal Mystery. . . . The Kelsdros had capitulated. If it had only happened yesterday, before he had given that check to Dr. Graymaster, before he had depleted his fortune by that hundred thousand in cash! But Opportunity, it is said, knows neither Yesterdays nor Tomorrows, only Todays. Opportunity was knocking—and he could not answer the door.

"Or," he demanded suddenly of himself, "could I?"

And again: "Why not? If they slipped down five hundred thousand, why not another hundred thousand? If I've got anything in this Personal Mystery gag at all, now's the time to show it."

And so he gave them their answer.

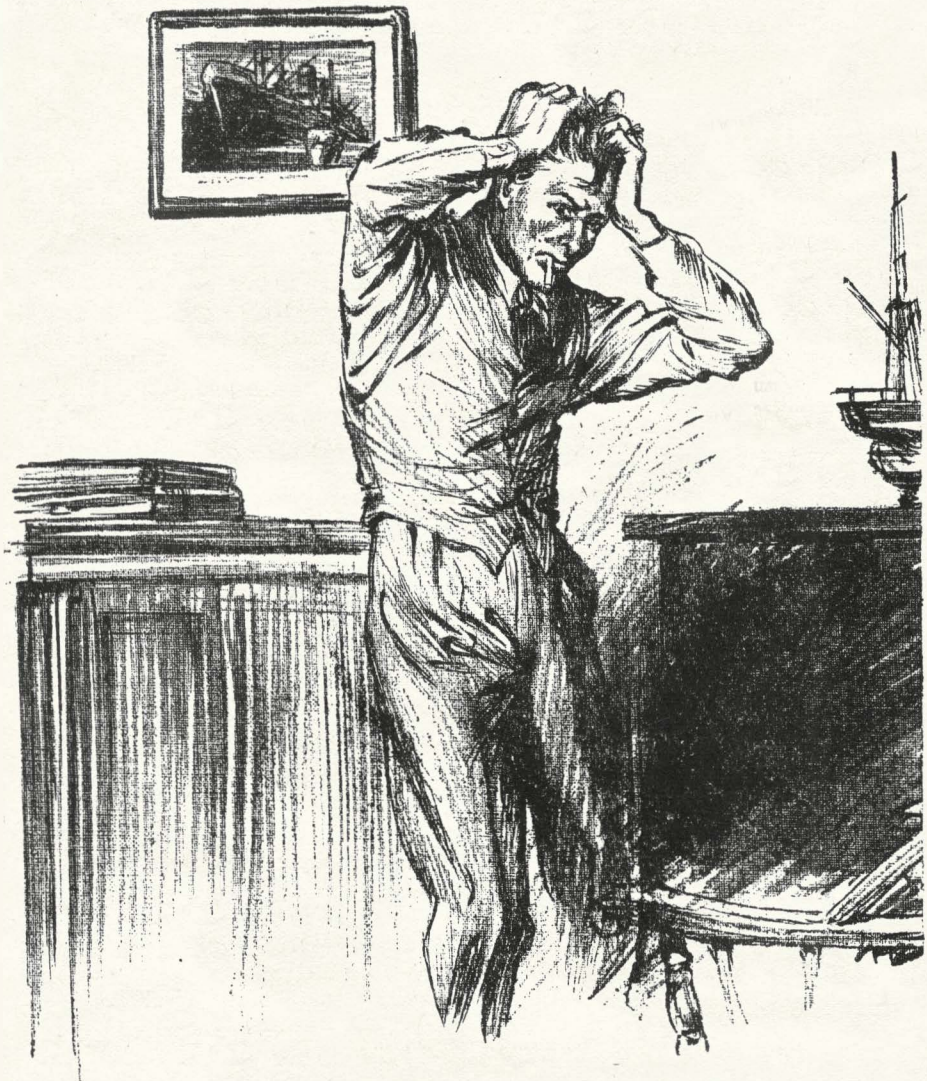
"See here, gentlemen," he said, his voice renewed in its tone as his heart was renewed in its courage. "Let me be as frank as yourselves. Bluntly, when I read that report this morning, I was—well, deeply disappointed. Checking over my resources and scanning my—ah—interests, I have found that I cannot place my hands on even half the amount you demand. In short, I am limited to a bare four hundred thousand dollars in liquid, available money. I have done a certain amount of investigating; your plan seems an excellent one. But while I am intrigued by the idea of—ah—financing your scheme, I find that, regardless of the reputation for fantastic wealth which the press has given me, I am not able to do so. I regret it. If, of course, a sum so far short of your needs could be useful—and if I could see a reasonable chance of turning even such an investment into a real profit—"

He shrugged in a manner which, he felt, was just the right one. So, he felt, a man of solid finances might shrug at a group of gentlemen soliciting the aid of his capital. It was a good shrug. It did him a world of spiritual good. Out of that shrug, the lost John J. Destiny reappeared, and Bentley Dewert retreated once more into mere ghostliness.

"That, gentlemen," he reiterated, "is my last word. It's regrettable. But that's the way it stands."

SILENCE followed his statement. It was a tortured silence. Judah Lee lifted his noble eyes and looked into those of Jeff Davis. Jeff turned and gazed at Calhoun. Calhoun, in turn sought the glance of Judah Lee. Among the Kelsdros there was little need of words.

"Mistah Destiny, suh," said the political Judah Lee, "if that's yo' last wo'd, it's a handsome wo'd. A right handsome wo'd. We Kelsdros accept that wo'd,



Bentley looked—and gasped. Those faces could not fall to be recognized. "Oh, God!" said Bentley.

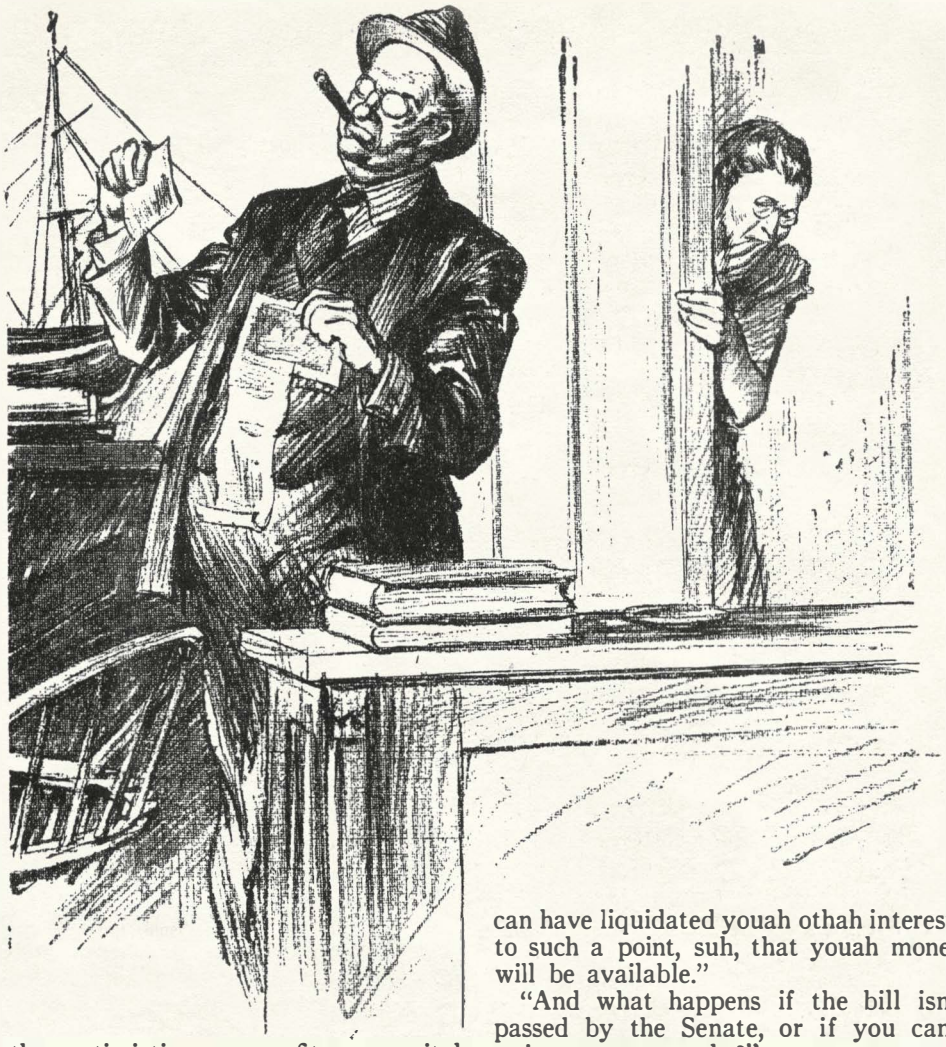
suh. We considah ouahse'ves boun' to accept that wo'd—boun' to show ouah appreciation of youah gesture, suh. Boun' to make a substantial effo't ouahse'ves. We'll raise the money, suh."

"You mean—that you can swing it with—with that much money?"

The three Kelsdro brothers nodded in agreement.

"We can swing it, suh," Calhoun responded. "We can charter ouah ships. I make it possible, suh, by transferrin' the crews of my coastwise vessels to ouah new ships, suh. That's ouah substantial effo't. I place my docks at Charleston at the disposal of ouah new company. The technicalities can be arranged with facility, suh. We shall need docks in New York when the shipping starts—docking fees are extremely high. We shall need a pe'manent crew for the ships, suh, not to mention fuel and such matters." He waved his fingers as though "such matters" were a mere formality instead of being computable in hundreds of thousands; and Bentley, caught up in the spirit of his talk, fired by the thrill of doing that rare thing frequently referred to as "big business," began painting brilliant pictures in his mind. Still, his natural caution made him say:

"Let me get it straight, gentlemen. You want me to supply four hundred thousand dollars in liquid cash. Against that, you pledge half a million Kelsdro money. We incorporate, and you charter five ships, holding them ready against the time when your bill becomes an operative law. I know very little about the value of cargoes, but I understand that my personal share of the income derived from the carrying of cotton and wheat to European points will run to about a hundred thousand a month. That seems



rather optimistic—as a profit on a capital of nine hundred thousand."

Jeff Davis picked that one up.

"Not quite, suh. Ouah capital is nine hundred thousand paid-in, whereas our total capital is half a million more, suh; and you are pledged to supply it within a reasonable time, suh. That gives you a controllin' interest and establishes ouah credit. We prefer that your holdin' be most impo'tant, suh, because it is impossible that the name of Kelsdro appear in this deal, for reasons which you can understand. It would not look quite right, suh, for the Kelsdros to be makin' money as a result of the Kelsdro Bill."

"What do you call a reasonable time?"

"Mattah of months, suh. The bill will go befoah the Senate in May. If it passes—which it's boun' to—then you will have the opportunity of completin' the amount needed. But ouah fleet will be ready to operate. That's the impo'tant thing, suh. And by that time you can have liquidated youah othah interests to such a point, suh, that youah money will be available."

"And what happens if the bill isn't passed by the Senate, or if you can't swing our monopoly?"

"The case will not arise, suh; but if that does happen, there will be losses. Naturally, suh. We must agree to dissolve and to divide what remains of the paid-in capital—what remains from the sums expended in charter and operation to that time, suh. I'm grateful that you bring up that angle, suh. We are all grateful. The situation will not arise at all, suh; but sound business must foresee such mattahs and be prepared to face them. Permit me to congratulate you upon youah foresight, suh. It is an admirable quality in a young man, although a rare one. Now if you will accompany us to ouah lawyers, suh, the agreements and the corporation charter can be discussed more fully."

AND there it was, in his lap, so to speak—resting in his hand. They had thrust it upon him. It was the greatest triumph of all for Personal Mystery.

Still, he hesitated. Four hundred thousand—it was a plunge of plunges; it was whole hog; it was like cutting a deck for your whole fortune. It *was* his entire fortune, or virtually so. His total bank balance, as he had figured it, deducting daily expenses and sundries, had been five hundred and fifty-six thousand dollars—now less a hundred thousand which, in a moment of temper, he had given to Graymaster. Moreover, there were taxes due, and when Uncle Sam had taken his toll, he would have a bare twenty thousand dollars over and above the sum he was so venturesomely planning to risk on this plausible "sure thing" of the Kelsdros.

"Maybe," he thought rapidly, "I'm just a sucker. . . . Still, there *is* a Congressman Kelsdro. There *is* a Kelsdro Bill, and it *did* just pass the House; and if these three Dixie pickers are going to lay half a million dollars on the line against my check, the thing can't be crooked." Then his courage surged again. "What the hell," he decided at last. "I'm acting as though it were my own money. It isn't. It's just a laboratory experiment. I might just as well make a big play as a little one. I'm the only one in the world who knows that my real capital is just that same thirty cents I had in my pocket before I saw Brood. What have I got to lose?"

So he said:

"Very well, gentlemen. Let's go see your lawyer."

FOR three long weeks Bentley had been gazing at that black reversed sign on the inner side of the frosted glass door.

DESTINY SHIPPING CORPORATION
J. J. DESTINY, President

It was neither Greek nor yet Russian. It was a language of special significance, the language (so he had grown to call it after arriving at a facility in backward reading) of Personal Mystery.

These, of course, were newer, smaller offices. He could not, even had he so desired, have maintained the sumptuous suite in the midtown skyscraper with its unused and empty rooms, with its Miss Spines and her rusty voice. Indeed not, for a shipping corporation must be in the so-called shipping district; and Bentley, at the suggestion of Calhoun Kelsdro, had taken smaller quarters down on Desbrosses Street. Furthermore, with a bare twenty thousand dollars in the world, he must live on a new and modified scale.

And thus he had been living, for three long weeks.

On his desk, at the right, was a file-basket containing a voluminous correspondence written on paper whose engraved heading was conspicuous by its absence; but at the bottom of each letter was a Kelsdro signature. Some were from Washington, others from Camden, still others from Charleston and divers other seaports. They were good letters. They were substantial letters. They contained, for Bentley's eyes and for those who might comprehend, an entire history of the DESTINY SHIPPING CORPORATION, *J. J. Destiny, President*. They carried a bewildering list of facts.

THE next fortnight was one of turmoil and of excitement, which began almost immediately after that visit to the offices of Judge Bonsall Leffertree, whom the brothers Kelsdro had called "ouah lawyer." Leffertree proved to be almost as loquacious as his clients, but he went to work on the proposed agreement in a manner so sure, so deft and full of knowledge, that after a mere two hours' conference Bentley found himself transformed from a mere individual into an operative company.

The partnership agreement was clear and simple.

"No unnecessary frills and dilly-dallying, gentlemen," Leffertree had rumbled, when he began outlining the plan. "A partnership is a sacred thing—among gentlemen of honor, such as I perceive you all are. Best way is to form a limited company. Limited responsibility—as far as Mr. Destiny is concerned—to the four hundred thousand dollars of his cash contribution. His balance can be considered a pledge. Quite sufficient, gentlemen. No need for legal rigmarole. Satisfactory, eh?"

And the Kelsdros nodded their satisfaction. The brothers three wrote their individual checks for $100,000, $250,000 and $150,000 respectively, with Congressman Judah Lee making the larger contribution.

These checks, along with Bentley's four hundred thousand dollars, were duly deposited with Judge Leffertree, who proposed an immediate deposit in a bank.

"I suggest that Mr. Destiny choose the institution," he urged, "inasmuch as he will be the resident New York partner. However, power-of-attorney in the mat-

ter of checks can be granted equally to all partners. Satisfactory, eh?"

And so it proved.

True, it was a trifle rapid. Bentley was frankly at sea in the outpouring of legal terminology and the glib quotations from tomes of corporation law which fell from the lips of the Judge; but in substance, the arrangement seemed utterly fair and equitable, the more especially as the firm was to bear his own name, the money in his own (the Sphinx National) bank, and the company officers to fill his own long-empty suite. Moreover he himself was to bear the title of manager, carrying full authority and given *carte blanche* to organize as he saw fit, guided only by the cautions and the long experience of Calhoun Kelsdro, shipping man.

And so, presently, the thing was done. The Kelsdros, after a luncheon which amounted to a miniature banquet, in which they drank rare old Bourbon to the success of the new enterprise and to the honor of their new partner John J. Destiny, departed—each to duties which must be fulfilled in order to make the future success of the company secure: Judah Lee to Washington to foster the passage of his bill through the Senate and to grease the wheels of officialdom so that when cotton stocks were transported, the Destiny Shipping Corporation would be in a preferred position to handle them; Calhoun to South America to complete the chartering of the ships; and Jeff Davis back to the deep South for a tour among the cotton men, with an eye to securing the coöperation of the cotton league when the time should come for opening business.

AND then began a time of confusion. There were not, it seemed to Bentley, enough hours in one business day in which to accomplish the maze of detailed duties which, he discovered, were required of the manager of a shipping company. Moreover, his ignorance of the business was something more than astounding. There was, he soon learned, an entirely new vocabulary—if not, indeed, a new language—to be mastered. The lobby of his offices, formerly filled with nonentities seeking financial aid or gifts out of his imaginary billions, was now crowded with all manner of officials from Port Authority, from Shipping Board, from Federal, State and municipal offices whose very names were meaningless to him, and whose language amazed and confused him beyond measure.

Days of study brought to light the existence of port charges, customs, harbor dues, wharfage costs, problems of docking time, locations, channels, unions, patents, licenses—a myriad of shipping papers whose very names were misleading and confusing: permits, contracts, inspection certificates, invoices and bills-of-lading. True, Calhoun Kelsdro had warned him that during these early days none of this was important, and that when the company actually got under way, all such matters would be handled through Government agencies. But Bentley's was a studious mind. It was not his way to grope blindly through a business in which he had invested an entire fortune. He studied; he worked; he advertised for experienced men to aid him. He employed a skeleton staff which should dress up the business to appear as competent while he himself delved in scores of tedious volumes in order to grasp some of the rudiments of the shipping business and its amazingly infinite ramifications.

HARD days those were, indeed, but happy ones.

"For the first time in my life," he told himself, "I've got my hands on something worth while. Why, this is great! This is big! I wouldn't even care about old Brood's million if I could only get going in this business. A man has his fingers on the pulse of a whole world." And he added, now and then in a wistful way: "And perhaps if I really did a job at this, *she* would begin to think I was somebody. I'll show her, by gosh!" There was stimulant in that.

Then, of course, the press.

The news of a new shipping company, however small, however obscure, is always to be printed. But when that company suddenly bursts into existence, bearing the name of New York's most fabulous mushroom-millionaire, it is virtually front-page news in any paper. And the press descended on the offices of the Destiny Shipping Corporation. Reporters came singly and in groups.

"Now, what's the story behind this, Mr. Destiny?" they asked. "How come you decided to go into shipping—of all businesses? Why not into Wall Street? There's where the money is. There's real gambling—you're a big-time gambler, aren't you, Mr. Destiny? Why go in for shipping?"

And Bentley found no good answer for that. He had pledged himself not to

mention the name of Kelsdro. To reveal the real purpose of this new company, would be its undoing.

"I'll just let you boys figure it out," he told them. "Your story will be just as good as mine."

They came back at him with:

"How about a statement that you come from a long line of seafaring men, and that now you've got some money, you're going to indulge a dream of youth? That's swell human-interest, Mr. Destiny. Will you let us quote you on that?"

"Sure," said Bentley. "I'll tell you a better one, too. Ever hear of Cap'n Destiny the pirate? No? Well, he was my great-great-great-grandfather. That give you an angle?"

It did. That was the kind of thing they loved. And the newspapers were full of headlines like:

EX-WHITE KNIGHT
ATONES FOR GRANDDAD'S SINS

And also:

JOHN J. DESTINY IN OCEAN SHIPPING:
TYCOON WILL REDEEM WRONGS OF ANCESTORS

And there were others of like and similar tenor which did not fail, even in the midst of his confusion, to bring a smile to Bentley's lips.

"Never thought the press was so credulous," he told himself. "If they'd swallow that stuff, they'd print stories about cheese in the moon. Personal Mystery! Wow! You hardly need it when people are like that."

THE brothers Kelsdro had gone, but their spirit seemed to hover near. Bentley was deeply impressed by the noble punctiliousness with which, in their Southern gentlemen's code, they reported and itemized all expenses and all drafts against the firm's bank-account.

From far-away Latin America, even, came Calhoun Kelsdro's letter, saying:

Desire to avoid all confusion by keeping our financial matters in a clear light. Hence feel it my duty to advise you immediately that I have drawn checks against our capital totaling one hundred thousand dollars, the details itemized below:

To the Maritime Sudamericaine (options)	*$75,000*
To one Sebastien Nada of Puerto R.	*10,000*
To one Blaise Barticolo, att'y	*5,000*
To Ybarra Blasco Iriguen Cie	*10,000*

And there followed a lengthy description of the affairs involved in arranging a time-charter for a small fleet of ships, with a quantity of advice for which Bentley was very grateful.

IT was easy to see that the Brothers Kelsdro were no pikers. They did things well, and in what Bentley called a "big way." True, they spent, in less than three weeks, practically four hundred thousand dollars in direct drafts on the new bank-account; yet they never failed to supply all the details nor to advise their non-Kelsdro partner of each check so drawn.

"Fine men," he assured himself. "Really fine men. Shows you what it is to have real gentlemen for partners. Now I must do something up here to show them that I'm not just holding down a swivel-chair job."

That was a penetrating thought. He read over the fine letter from Judah Lee Kelsdro, and the thought took wings and became an urge. Said the Congressman:

Honored Partner,

It is my pleasure to advise you that by dint of some considerable effort on my part, and with an equally considerable amount of good fortune, the bill upon which we are all waiting will now be presented to the Senate early in April rather than May as was at first anticipated. Costs to secure this good fortune have been, I am afraid, rather high, both as to pledges of a political nature and as to actual moneys disbursed where they might achieve real results.

At this writing I must advise you of a total of two hundred thousand dollars in checks drawn over my signature against our New York account, in detail as follows:

Committee-for-Progress Contributions	*$70,000.00*
National Merchants League	*50,000.00*
Personal expenditures (approximately)	*6,500.00*
Individuals X, Y, and Z (best unnamed)	*73,500.00*

From Jeff Davis, on a tour through the cotton belt, came the rather glowing announcement that the majority of cotton-league members were sympathetic to the idea of choosing a single but well-equipped shipping company to handle the export cotton when, as and if the Kelsdro Bill should become law. He too made some considerable expenditures, which he explained in terms which delicately

avoided the actual word *bribery*, but which permitted Bentley to draw conclusions which seemed scarcely less than obvious. All told, Kelsdro had distributed another hundred thousand dollars through seven States in matters which included a press campaign, a series of editorials and what appeared to be the outright purchase of a powerful newspaper.

"That's what I've got to do," Bentley repeated. "I've got to get something done up here that will show them that they don't have to carry the entire burden. Something, but what? I wouldn't really know a consular declaration from a drydock. This shipping business is just so many new terms to me—and that's all."

Still, something had to be done. A man has his pride.

HIS chance came the very next day. A swarthy gentleman who sent in the name of Sol Barbey, broker, was announced, and escorted to Bentley's managerial offices by the efficient Miss Spines. Barbey smoked a cigar, puffed constantly and had himself wrapped in an air of slightly unpleasant mystery.

"Howdy," he said, reaching for Bentley's hand. "Listen! You gotta shippin' line, but you aint got no wharf. Wharfs cost money. Maybe you got all the money in the world. From what I read in the papers, that's so. But before you get through buildin' a wharf, you gotta spoil a cold million, Mister. Now maybe I'm in a spot where I could save you some coin. Interested?"

Bentley was and said so.

Barbey leaned forward.

"Ever hear of Bartchmann, Holz & Kuhn? No? Well, they was a big outfit which went bust last year. The city has tied up their wharves, see—some sorta litigation. No matter. Well, I got it straight from a pal o' mine, who got it from a judge, that the city's gonna pull its hooks off of them wharves. You could get 'em."

"How much? Where are they? How good are they? What railroad facilities?"

"Brooklyn," said Sol Barbey, answering the second question first. "And they're swell. Every shipper in the city has tried to grab 'em, but the city has 'em sewed up tight. When they're loose, there'll be a rush, Mister. But I could get you a ground-floor option on them—for money."

"How much money?"

"Reasonable. I want two and a half per cent of your lease money—cash."

"How much?" repeated Bentley, for the third time.

"I want five grand—cash. To me, personal. Wanna know how come I can swing it? Because my brother's the guy who supervises wharfing in this burg—Abe Barbey. Look him up and ask him. Me, I'm a broker, but I don't mind turnin' over a penny."

"So I perceive," said Bentley. "Now, can you give me proof that my investment in you will get results, Mr. Barbey?"

Barbey grinned.

"Proof, is it? Wanna come downtown with me and talk to my brother in his office?"

Bentley did. He found Commissioner Barbey, Sol's brother, no less greedy for "a penny" than his brother. He could and would release the Bartchmann wharves to the Destiny Company—for a consideration. The consideration was another five thousand dollars. Bentley reflected rapidly. Surely it would be smart business to secure a lease on a fine wharfing location.

They went to Brooklyn; and Barbey himself, with a key intrusted to him, unlocked the Bartchmann doors and showed Bentley around.

It was a fine, modern place. It would hold, Bentley estimated, fifty thousand bales of cotton. It was easily accessible, and it had its own railroad siding.

From his reading and study and investigation, he had learned that for such fine wharfing quarters a price of fifty thousand dollars was a modest lease over ten years.

Strong in him, too, was that powerful urge to "show the Kelsdros" that he was able to turn a quick trick when it came up. Briefly, he concluded the deal, signed two checks for five thousand dollars each, handed them to the Barbey gentlemen, wrote three letters to the Kelsdros advising them in detail of this first substantial draft against the company accounts, and went home to bed with a feeling of a man who has done a job.

But morning proved a disillusionment.

REACHING his office, walking but lightly on the tops of little clouds, so blithe was his spirit, he barely noticed the grim expression on the face of Miss Spines. But when she said her little

piece, he felt a sensation similar to that one may acquire on a shoot-the-chutes.

Miss Spines said:

"Better call the bank, Mr. Destiny. It appears that you handed some one a rubber check—cashier who called says his name is Branch."

Bentley hastened to the telephone.

Mr. Branch was prompt in answering his call.

"Mr. Destiny? Oh, glad you phoned. I wasn't quite sure how to handle those two five-thousand-dollar checks you gave yesterday to somebody by the name of Barbey."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"You have something under twenty thousand in your personal account, sir; but your company account is practically exhausted. Quite exhausted, if I'm not mistaken, sir. I believe you have no company balance at all. Now if you intend to deposit, say, this morning, of course we'll be glad to put those checks through. Or would you prefer to have me draw against your personal account, Mr. Destiny?"

"Wait," said Bentley. "There's some mistake. We should have—why, good God, we have half a million dollars in the company account. What are you talking about?"

"Sorry, sir; I can't imagine our bookkeepers making an error of that dimension. Our records show an original deposit of your own check for four hundred thousand dollars, and several drafts against it signed Kelsdro. In fact, the entire amount has been drawn. Perhaps you'd better come down here—if you can, sir."

"I'll be right down," said Bentley, feeling dry and weak.

BUT he did not go right down. He called Information and asked for the number of Judge Leffertree's law offices, giving the address and the room-number. Information, after a considerable time, replied:

"Sorry, sir; we have no such name recorded. Possibly you are mistaken in the address."

Miss Spines, tapping at his door, announced another visitor, a Mr. Jo Caddis. And Jo himself came stomping in without waiting for her invitation.

"Howsa big-shot, feller? Howsa shippin' business? Say, what was it you said was the name o' them brothers who handed you this million dollar set-up? Kelsdro?"

"Yes," said Bentley, wearily. "That's the name."

"Congressman Judah Lee Kelsdro from Carolina?"

"That was one of them."

"Okay, son, I want you should looka this picture and tell me if it's him."

HE held out a torn piece of newspaper upon which a three-quarter photo of a man was printed atop a column, under headlines which read:

BILL GOES TO SENATE EARLY

And under the picture was the caption:

Judah Lee Kelsdro, Carolina congressman whose drastic export-exchange measure may be a weighty factor in the surplus cotton situation.

Bentley stared at it.

"Why—why, that isn't Congressman Kelsdro at all," he told Jo Caddis. "Where did you get— Say, Jo, what *is* this?"

"Huh?" said Jo, with mock innocence. "Oh, just a hunch, that's all. Now take a look at this other picture. I kept it a long time. Once, a long time ago, a bunch of gyp artists nearly took poor ol' Jo Caddis for a ride. Almost, but not quite. Take a look, son."

He held out another paper.

Bentley looked—and gasped. It was another newspaper clipping. The paper was faded and yellow, but the caption across the two-column cut was clear:

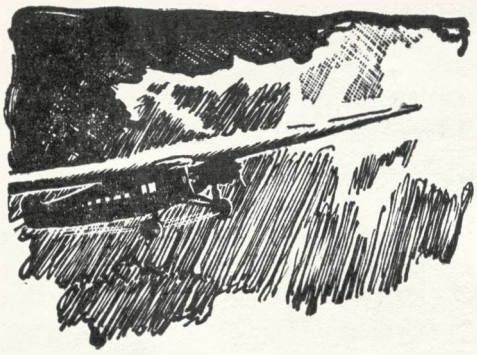
RELEASED FROM ATLANTA PRISON

The notorious Borrow triplets, (to use their best-known alias) former vaudeville troupers, reputed to be the smartest swindlers in this country, have just completed their four-year term in Atlanta and are reported to have plans for departing to South America.

Bentley's whole world was reeling. Those faces could not fail to be recognized anywhere. The costumes were the striped prison garb; but the ingratiating smiles, the "honest" straightforward eyes, the lofty and noble brows, were those of the gentlemen who, as Calhoun, Judah Lee and Jeff Davis Kelsdro, had persuaded him to invest four hundred thousand dollars in the shipping business.

"Oh, God!" said Bentley.

A hard fall, Mr. Destiny! Can you take it, and come back? . . . Be sure to read the next episode, in our enlarged September issue.



This and the following stories of adventure are contributed by our readers in accordance with the prize offer detailed on page 3. First the stirring story of Admiral Byrd's all-but-disastrous transatlantic flight is told by a distinguished officer who shared it.

By
LIEUT. COMMANDER
G. O. NOVILLE

Hell on High

TWO men sitting tensely at the controls of a giant tri-motored airplane, a third peering intently over their shoulders into the impenetrable mist of night fog, the fourth lying exhausted on the floor of the flight compartment.

Suddenly a terrific crash—wood and steel tearing and rending apart—the plane breaks in two in the middle. For a fraction of a second a curtain of water hides the crippled plane; and as it descends, the waters of the Atlantic close over the wreckage. So ended the flight of the *America*, Commander Byrd's transatlantic plane. The first commercial aircraft, with the first cargo of transatlantic air mail ever to negotiate the eastern ocean, was under the sea.

Twenty-nine days after Lindbergh's epoch-marking flight, Commander Byrd took off, on June 29th, 1927, from Roosevelt Field, N. Y., in the tri-motored Fokker *America*. This was to be the first non-stop flight between New York and Paris, France, in a commercial plane carrying trans-oceanic air mail. In the pilot's compartment, or "office," were Bert Acosta and myself. In the navigating compartment were Commander Byrd and Bernt Balchen. We were carrying a tremendous load; the Fokker creaked and groaned trying to gain altitude after we staggered off the fifty-four-hundred-foot runway. Acosta's handling of the 16,800-pound load was masterly.

The following forty-one hours were just plain hell. We took off in a rain and had to fight for every inch of altitude. Up the coast, and over Maine, we fought the weather. Clouds and rain hampered visibility as the big ship wallowed along doggedly. North of Bangor we swung eastward out over the open water and headed for Newfoundland—still climbing "upstairs." As we used up gasoline from the main tank, we refilled it from our reserve supply of five-gallon tins. We left a trail of empty tins all the way across Newfoundland. We flew directly over Cape Race, and reported by radio that all was well and that we were heading out over the Atlantic. The weather report from Cape Race indicated bad weather ahead. We had expected bad weather somewhere on the crossing, but certainly didn't expect it in the profusion in which we found it. Two hours after leaving Cape Race astern, we ran into a typical Newfoundland Banks "pea-soup" fog, as heavy as smoke and wet as rain. We tried to climb over it and gave up at 10,200 feet; at that altitude with the heavy load the controls were sloppy and the ship was hard to hold. We came down to three hundred, trying to slip under the fog, but it seemed to lie right on the surface of the water. So back up we went to 8500 feet and flew by dead reckoning—simple for us, but not so easy for the Commander. Bert and I were equipped with telephone head-sets. A loud-speaking magnavox phone-system had been installed between the navigating compartment and the pilot's compartment. As we slithered along through the dense fog, the Commander's voice would come sharply over the phone: "Half a point left—steady," or: "Right—right—right—steady." We flashed radio signals con-

tinuously, trying to pick up two ships at the same time, from whose bearings we might be able to triangulate and determine our position and course.

For five hours we flew into the blinding, nerve-destroying fog. At the end of the five hours we were all a little jittery—it was like trying to walk blindfolded. Six—seven—eight—nine—ten hours, and no sight of sea or sky, only occasionally a faint answer from some lone ship when we poured a radio distress-signal into the blanketing mist. At the end of ten hours Commander Byrd asked us if we wanted to turn back. We shook our heads violently—we didn't want another ten hours such as we had just run through. All through the night Acosta's handling of the ship was uncanny; occasionally he would turn the controls over to one of us and wipe his streaming eyes. A few quick puffs on a cigarette; then he would nod, take over the controls and push his head out the open window. The wet fog made his goggles useless, and his eyes were taking a terrific beating. Fifteen hours at the controls with only brief rests were wearing him down; his eyes were bloodshot and his face drawn, but his touch on the controls was as sure as ever.

We were four blind men fighting the elements. Then, at the end of the seventeenth hour, we raised two ships by radio and got bearings. Commander Byrd's fingers flew as he slid protractors and scale over the chart. Triangulation gave us our position: only a short distance south of our course. We corrected and headed for the coast of France. That afternoon we passed high above the S.S. *Paris* of the French Line. Her captain radioed that the weather was clearing on the surface and we slid down to eight hundred feet, and for the first time in nineteen hours we saw something other than fog—water, and plenty of it. At eight that night we passed over Brest, France, exactly on our course. Acosta was relieved; Balchen, following instructions, swung north, picked up the Seine and pointed the nose at Paris.

We followed the Seine for half an hour, flying low. It was getting very dark outside, and we climbed up through the clouds. As soon as we were on top, we started pitching and tossing. Ahead of us we could faintly see two extremely black cloud formations traveling rapidly toward each other. Balchen "poured on the coal," but we got caught in the maw of the oncoming storm.

Then we really got a ride. We were pitched and tossed around like a cork on a stormy sea. Lightning danced and flashed all around us; then the rain came down in a deluge. We radioed to Le Bourget, the field at Paris, and asked what weather conditions were there. The answer was prompt and discouraging, "Visibility zero-zero—the worst weather in twenty years." That was our last radio message. With a crack like a whiplash both windows blew out, and the cabin and radio compartments were flooded. The fabric covering the fuselage around the "office" started to rip and shred.

The winds were violent and seemed to have no particular direction. The lighting circuit to the instrument panel short-circuited and left the instruments in darkness. The Commander climbed into the right-hand flying seat, and with his face pressed almost against the instruments, he checked every movement of the ship. Suddenly we ran out of the rain, and the winds died down; but from below another menace came creeping up. More fog—and in a few minutes everything was blotted out. Here we were stranded aloft and only two hundred miles from our destination. For the next two hours we strained every nerve and eye-muscle trying to penetrate the dense curtain ahead. Suddenly Balchen shouted and pointed ahead. A great circle of light filtered up through the fog. Paris at last—but it was a forlorn hope.

FOR two hours we circled that patch of light in the fog, praying for a hole. . . . . At midnight the situation became serious, for we had only three hours' gas left. At the end of that three hours we would have to land, whether we wanted to or not. Commander Byrd pointed out that if we were forced down anywhere in the closely populated area surrounding Paris, we would certainly kill ourselves and probably a lot of other people. He wasted no time in discussion. He pointed out to Balchen and to me the course he wanted taken to get us away from Paris. The new course led back to the open water of the Channel. Instructions were to fly low and fast, and to land in the first field or open area large enough to take the ship.

We dropped down to 2500 feet, then 1500 feet, trying to see the terrain beneath. Useless! The fog had closed in behind us, and now all of France seemed blotted out. Acosta gave up from sheer

exhaustion, and stretched out on the "office" floor. We dropped flare after flare into the cottony mist, only to have them swallowed up. Three hours after leaving Paris, Balchen's sharp eye picked up a tiny glow of light, appearing and disappearing regularly. This could only indicate a lighthouse. We dropped down to four hundred feet and circled the lighthouse, thinking that in the beam of light we might see the beach and land there. The fog again defeated us; it was so thick that as soon as the light hit the mist, it was dissipated, and the light only served to outline dimly the lighthouse tower.

The Commander shook his head and waved at the gasoline gauges—they registered zero. We had only about fifteen minutes' gas left. He leaned over to Balchen and put his finger on the 4000-foot mark on the altimeter—then pointed west and held up two fingers. "Up to four thousand feet and go out two miles —over the water." He afterward explained that "two miles"—said he wanted to get out beyond where any of the thousands of French fishing-boats might be anchored inshore because of the storm and fog. He turned to me and shouted: "Clear the ship for a forced landing."

That meant tearing out the radio and throwing it overboard, tearing out the navigation tables, chairs and instruments and tossing them out, so that the heavier gear wouldn't be thrown down on us or that we wouldn't be thrown against it when we crashed. The Commander was perfectly cool; he leaned down and patted Acosta on the shoulder and got an answering grin. He turned to Balchen and me and said: "Sorry I got you fellows into this."

Then things really began to happen; first the starboard engine commenced to spit and sputter; then they all started coughing, and then—silence. It was only then we discovered how complete silence could be. We were all deafened by the continuous roar of the motors for forty long hours, and it was only by screaming with full lung power that we were able to make each other hear. Balchen and I glanced at the altimeter simultaneously; it read four thousand feet. We discovered a few seconds later that the reading was in error by at least two thousand feet, due to some mechanical failure or to a stuck indicator. The Commander peered downward into the fog and mist, then turned and shouted: "Take her in." The plane nosed over, the shriek of the wind took on a higher note as Balchen dived the ship to pick up speed—then suddenly the world seemed to explode, and I found myself swimming around in the darkness.

THE crash in itself was terrifying, but the next moments were definitely the most nerve-racking I have ever experienced. It was pitch dark, and not even a fragment of the wrecked plane was in sight. My first thought was: "Am I the only survivor? Where are the skipper, and Acosta and Bernt?" It was useless to swim, because I didn't know in what direction France might be. I was treading water, looking wildly around, when almost under my nose the tail of the plane broke water. I made a few frantic strokes and heaved a sigh of relief as I got my arms around it, for I was completely exhausted and somewhat dazed.

Very shortly Commander Byrd swam out of the darkness and joined me. He shouted inquiries concerning Balchen and Acosta. I answered that Balchen was probably somewhere in the wreckage, and that I thought Acosta had been thrown clear. He looked out into the darkness and said: "Better look for Acosta, while I see if I can locate Balchen." So at three-thirty in the morning I started out into the ocean looking for a man.

I sighted Acosta about twenty yards from the tail of the ship, which was slowly rising from the water. Bert was injured and was making hard going of it. He turned when I pointed out the tail to him, and we swam back. By the time we reached the plane, Commander Byrd had salvaged Balchen and was pushing him up on the wing, which by this time was lying flat on the surface with the waves washing over it.

We worked fast; Acosta and Balchen were pulled and pushed up onto the wing. The Commander and I managed to locate the rubber boat in the wreckage, hauled it out and pumped it up. The second it was afloat, we piled in; the Commander gave us our direction from a small pocket-compass; and bobbing along like a cork, we again took off for France. This time we made it. In about an hour the boat grounded on the shore at Ver-sur-Mer. We had used three methods of transportation to get to France: flying, swimming and rowing. Today, as I look at the big Pan-American Clippers, I shudder to think of the chance we took in the little *America*.

Trader's Gold

A fantastic experience with the Russians in Siberia.

WE worked along the coast until we came to Okhotsk itself; and there we ran smack into the Russian revolution. The remnants of the White navy had just taken the village with their fleet, which consisted of two tramp steamers and a little gunboat. But we landed without any difficulty after the White officials had boarded our ship and gone carefully through all of our papers and collected a lot of revenues from us.

There were about a thousand Korean miners there, and some Russian placer miners. Everybody seemed to have a little gold. So we traded merchandise for gold as well as for furs. We kept it all in a stout canvas bag. Before we were ready to leave we had over fourteen thousand dollars in that bag.

Captain George Stavrokov, one of the owners of the ship, was along, and a young Russian, Mark Grinstein, who was one of the smartest traders I have ever known. We stayed there three days and then were ready to pull out. We had taken most of our things down to the launch which was to take us back to the *Tungus*, and Mark and I were cleaning up a few things at the house, when Captain Stavrokov came up and said that General Polyakov, commander of the White forces, was down at the launch and wanted to go out with us in it, to go aboard his own gunboat.

I asked Mark what he had done with the bag of gold, and he said that he had given it to the second mate, who was in charge of the launch, so it was all right.

But when we got down to the launch, we found it wasn't all right at all. The launch, the second mate, General Polyakov, and the bag of gold were gone! Some of our own boys were on the beach looking rather confused and helpless. They told us that Polyakov had commandeered the launch because his little gunboat had been in some bad seas and his launch had been washed off the davits and lost. He had originally intended to give us a ride back to our own ship, but he finally got tired of waiting for us. He was roaring drunk anyway, and had suddenly pulled out his gun, pointed it at the second mate, and shouted: "Full speed ahead!"

For over four hours we sat around talking about it, and no one had anything good to say about the revolution. Finally we all lay down on the floor and went to sleep. About four o'clock in the morning a young White Russian lieutenant, a couple of soldiers, and the second mate, came in and woke us up, telling us they'd take us back to the boat.

As soon as we were outside, walking down the beach in the dark, the second mate and Mark and I got a little ahead of the rest so we could talk.

"What did you do with the gold?" Mark whispered to the second mate.

"I put it in the shaft-alley," the other said. "I covered it up with an old bag."

"Where is it now?" Mark went on.

"I suppose it's still there," the mate answered. "I didn't see anyone take it."

"Like hell it is!" I said.

But Mark, with the confidence of youth, said: "Leave it to me. I'll get it back or know why."

All the way back to the ship I could see Mark in the stern of the launch feeling about here and there, whispering to the mate, and hear the mate's hoarse, excited answer. But just before we got to the *Tungus*, Mark came to me:

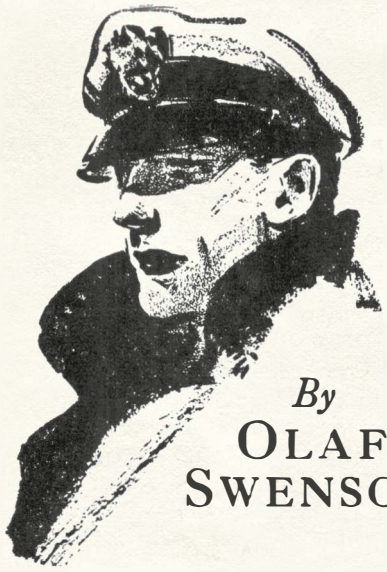
"It isn't there," he said in disgust. "Try and get them to come aboard with us, and I'll go to work on 'em."

"You can't start anything with the Russian Army," I said.

"I don't mean that I'll take a punch at anybody," he argued. "We got better ways than that."

So I got them all aboard and told the cook to bring us the best supper he could scare up. We all sat down to food and plenty of vodka. Mark kept urging them to drink, and I found a few presents for them, some fur mittens, which were better than anything the Russian army issued, cigarettes, and plenty of tobacco for all of them. In an hour we had our arms around each other's shoulders like traditional brothers. Then Mark began to get his work in.

He had picked out a tall, good-looking Russian named Mishka as his particular friend, a soldier who had been all



By
OLAF
SWENSON

through the revolution, a chauffeur for Simioneff, and a noted character among the Whites. It was obvious that he carried himself with considerable authority and that he would be a valuable ally.

I saw Mark looking very depressed, sitting with his head in his hands next to Mishka, and Mishka seemed concerned. When he asked what was the matter, Mark began to cry. He did it beautifully, too, with big tears rolling down his cheeks, and his mouth screwed up so he looked like a baby whose candy has just been taken away from him.

"That big American," he whimpered, pointing to me, "is going to kill me if I don't get that gold back."

MISHKA looked puzzled, but he was not one to let his friend down.

"What gold?" he asked. "Where is it? I, Mishka, will get it for you."

"I don't know where it is," Mark sobbed. "I put it down, and it's gone. I was responsible for that gold with my life."

Now Mishka's arm was about Mark's shoulder, and he patted him gently; his face shone with the bright light of devotion to a friend, and high determination. So Mark told him the whole story.

Mishka's eyes lit up and he smiled.

"Oh, that gold!" he said. "I know where that gold is. Ivan's got it. Come with me. I shall cut Ivan's heart out!"

Mark, of course, was perfectly sober all the time, and he followed Mishka without hesitation. Going out, he leaned over swiftly and whispered in my ear:

"For God's sake, keep the lieutenant here until we get back."

The other soldier followed Mishka while I gave the lieutenant another drink and talked fast about everything I could think of which he would want to hear. I enlarged upon what a fine-looking lot of men he had, asked questions about the army's recent occupation of Okhotsk, and got him to describe other victories. I heard the launch chugging away from the side of the boat, and I was half on my toes with nervousness for an hour while I sat drinking and talking with the lieutenant. Then I heard Captain Krakmalov tell the engineer to get up steam and take in the anchor.

Meanwhile Mark and Mishka and the other soldier were on their way to the gunboat, cementing their friendship with vows of eternal fealty, and Mishka was telling Mark how he knew that Ivan had the gold. When the latter had come aboard the gunboat from the launch, he had a small heavy canvas sack on his shoulder, Mishka said. When one of the crew asked him what he had there, he had said that it was shot, adding that he was going to do some hunting.

Mark still didn't know what would happen when they got to the gunboat. He figured that they couldn't go to General Polyakov. He was in a drunken stupor for one thing, but even if they could make him understand what it was all about, they would probably be worse off than before. The Whites needed gold badly and the General would undoubtedly have taken the gold with no more compunction than he showed in taking the launch.

But Mishka had no intention of going to the General. He knew his Ivan and knew how to handle him. They went aboard the gunboat as quietly as possible and went direct to the engine-room, where they found Ivan asleep. Mishka went directly to him, shook him roughly to wake him, and still holding onto him, said: "Where is it?" Ivan never said a word. He just lay there shaking like a leaf, and reaching under his pillow, pulled out the bag of gold and handed it to Mishka, who passed it on to Mark.

Then they all came back to the *Tungus*. By now the lieutenant was practically out. So it was a simple matter, for a crew who was used to handling sacks of flour and bundles of fur, to load him onto the launch without bothering to tell him good night. Then, almost before the launch, which had been ours and now belonged to Russia, was started back to the Russian gunboat, the screw of the *Tungus* was turning and we were headed away from there.

Rounding up Moro

By MAJOR CALVIN CARTER

GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING was, in 1913, Commanding General of the Military Department of Mindanao, when some two thousand fanatical Moros on the island of Jolo (incited by their Mohammedan priests, who saw that their power would be destroyed if the American schools continued to function) entrenched themselves on Bagsak Mountain and defied the Government.

General Pershing took personal command of a force of American soldiers, Philippine Scouts, and Philippine Constabulary, and embarked on an Army transport at Zamboanga, Mindanao, shortly after dark. The transport arrived at a point on the coast of Jolo near the foot of Bagsak Mountain, showing no lights, and before daybreak all of the troops were landed and were on the march up the mountain.

The Moros had acquired a considerable number of firearms, smuggled in from North Borneo, and so were fairly well equipped to put up a stiff fight except for the fact that their marksmanship was atrociously poor. Before nightfall, however, they were utterly defeated, and Bagsak strewn with dead and wounded. The loss of lives of American and native soldiers was relatively small.

In their resolve to die, a few of the Datus weakened before the end and escaped through the tall grass with their followers. Principal among these outlaw leaders were Hasaan, Jahandal, Tahil, Sahipa and Japal.

The chieftains who had fled when they saw the day was lost on Bagsak scattered, with their subjects, to various parts of Jolo, and built small forts in hidden jungles and on hill-tops, digging deep trenches with underground passages, and planting thick bamboo around the edge. General Pershing established one-company stations of Scouts and Constabulary in different sections with instructions to locate and destroy these bands, for they had begun to prey on the friendly Moros, stealing work-animals and food supplies.

I was then a first lieutenant in the Philippine Constabulary, commanding a company stationed at Cotabato on the Island of Mindanao, and was temporarily transferred to Taglibi, Jolo; at the same time I was appointed a Deputy Provincial Governor for this district. Hardly a night passed that our camp was not fired upon from behind near-by trees. The outlaws would fire volleys and run, so there was no chance of following them in the dark. In this manner one of my men was killed and four were wounded in two weeks.

Through the good offices of friendly natives and the exchange of many oral messages, I persuaded Hasaan, generally considered the most dangerous man left alive after the defeat at Bagsak, to come to the beach near my camp for a conference. Knowing his reputation for treachery, I stipulated that he should come alone, while I should have a proper guard of soldiers. I of course promised him safe-conduct to and from the conference.

The meeting took place at midnight; and after much talking and smoking, Hasaan agreed to surrender unconditionally except for the assurance that he would not be hanged. The Mohammedan religion teaches that a person who is punished for a crime by hanging cannot enter heaven.

Hasaan was elegantly if somewhat picturesquely attired in a colorful costume consisting of tight-fitting purple velvet breeches reaching to his ankles, with a row of bell-shaped gold buttons on each side from top to bottom. He wore a loose coat of red silk, buttoned up the front with round gold buttons.

Following his agreement to surrender, Hasaan tendered me his kris with all the formality and dignity befitting his royal rank. This kris was a work of art and exceptionally valuable even for a sultan.

He was taken into custody, later tried in the civil court, and received a sentence of twenty years' imprisonment.

THE Island of Jolo is only three hundred and twenty square miles in area, and it was not long before we learned the location of Japal's *cotta* or fort. We planned our attack to be a surprise assault at dawn. The *cotta* was situated on

Outlaws

An officer of the Philippine Constabulary tells of a savage campaign.

the slope of a small mountain in the midst of tall trees and large boulders, and even at this time of morning there were sentries posted in the thick upper leaf-covered branches of several of the trees. I first discovered this when five of the cartridges were shot from the outer line of my first sergeant's belt, and I noted the slanting course the bullet had taken.

I had my men concentrate their fire on the tops of the trees standing within the fort, and was soon treated to the gruesome sight and sound of two human bodies falling to earth.

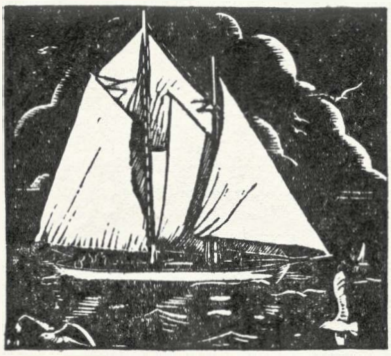
Knowing our superiority in arms and position (we had approached from the top of the mountain), I instructed my soldiers to take no unnecessary risks and to advance gradually, taking advantage of all available cover. When we reached the *cotta,* after about an hour's continuous firing, all of its thirty-two occupants were dead or dying, and our only casualties had been three men slightly wounded. We collected nine guns and a number of cutting weapons and returned to camp.

Jahandal and his men had built their *cotta* in the middle of a large grass-covered plateau. The Philippine Scout company stationed in the town of Jolo had wiped out this band in a brilliant engagement; but I kept getting rumors that Jahandal had miraculously escaped with two high-powered rifles, although Captain McEllery, who commanded the Scouts at this fight, assured me that it was impossible.

It was finally definitely learned that just before the soldiers' charge, this chief had ordered his few remaining followers to bury him alive, with the two guns, underneath clods of dirt. This they did; and no doubt bamboo tubes, or something of the kind, were inserted into his hiding-place so that he would be able to breathe. At any rate he survived, and dug himself out after the Scouts retired. It was highly important to capture or kill this man, since because of his escape, under such circumstances, he was being credited with supernatural powers and would be able to enlist hundreds of Moros whenever he chose to do so.

Upon learning that Jahandal often visited the home of his wife's brother Nakib Untung, between midnight and dawn, we watched the approaches to Untung's house for several nights, but Jahandal was too wary to be caught in this manner. Captain Vernon L. Whitney, Governor of Sulu, authorized me to offer a money reward for Jahandal's head (he wanted to be sure of identification in order to dispel the beliefs about his invulnerability), and later added to this the prize of a Krag rifle. Besides this tempting offer, great pressure was brought to bear to induce Nakib Untung to betray his brother-in-law, but he refused to cooperate until the Sultan of Sulu promised to elevate him from the lower religious rank of Nakib to that of Maharajah. Shortly after this he came to our camp at two o'clock in the morning and presented me with the severed head—which I had the distasteful task of escorting to the capital and turning over to the governor. Yet I also had a sense of achievement, and satisfaction in having been instrumental in ridding my government of a dangerous enemy.

I also could not help a small feeling of satisfaction, mingled with that of revulsion, when the details surrounding Jahandal's gruesome death were recounted. Untung had placed one of his men underneath the house, which stood on pillars about eight feet from the ground; and when Jahandal descended the ladder after his visit to see his wife, who was living with her brother while her husband was in hiding, this man had run him through with a spear. After his victim had fallen, the heartless murderer drew his barong and danced gleefully around the body, while slashing at it. Mrs. Jahandal, hearing the commotion, came to the door, grasped the situation, stepped lightly down the ladder, and with her own barong eliminated her husband's slayer.



Plenty Big

I SPEARED my first tiger-shark off Barbados, more than fifteen years ago, with a crude harpoon fashioned out of an old-fashioned French bayonet. And I still think simple swivel-headed harpoons of my own manufacture are the best.

My most successful shark expedition was to the atoll of Hao in the Tuamotu, or Dangerous Isles Archipelago, in the Pacific. At first I set out shark lines, the hooks baited with five pounds of eel, and I'd have a lively time pulling in the vicious brutes. Then I would quickly strip them of their hides and salt them down for shagreen, which made excellent book-binding material.

But harpooning sharks was much finer sport. It is difficult to harpoon them from a small boat, especially a native outrigger canoe. Poised in the bow of one of these craft, I had to sway and bend forward and backward, to the rise and fall of the canoe, and many times I missed my target by a wide margin, or struck only a shallow blow and my harpoon would pull out. I had better luck spearing them from submerged coral reefs, just awash, or from the fringing-reefs of islets enclosing the wide lagoon.

I had to use care not to step on the poisonous spines of *vanas* (deadly black sea-urchins) which bristled everywhere. I also had to be careful I didn't step on a brittle coral fan and fall through—into the jaws of a waiting shark.

I USUALLY had to locate my sharks through a glass-paned water-box. The open end of the box was large enough to insert my head, and placing the glassed end into the water, I could see fathoms below. Soon a long gray body would cruise into the picture. Then I'd put my water-box aside, and toss fragments of eels and fishes onto the surface. Craftily the monster would circle, then with a rush would come at the floating bait. . . .

There was, of course, a limit to the size of sharks I could harpoon in the lagoons of Hao, for sharks over ten feet long would not enter the lagoon. I had been anxious for a long time to see what size sharks I could harpoon with my quintuple-barbed spears, so you can imagine my pleasure when a small trading schooner from Tahiti called in at Hao one morning. I bargained with the Tahitian skipper for a shark expedition in the sea off the atoll, and after much haggling, he agreed to take me out the next day.

WE went out through the reef-pass under power, but a mile or two off Hao the engine broke down, and there was no wind to fill the sails, so we were becalmed. The noon sun was blistering, the sea an empty, oily calm, without a breath of wind to ripple its dazzling surface. I peered across the slowly undulating surface of the ocean for signs of sharks, who have a strong attraction for drifting schooners. But not a single fin cleaved through the brilliant expanse of water; my fragments of pig viscera floated upon the surface, scorned.

I finally became tired of my vigil. "Where in the devil are all the big sharks you told me about?" I shouted.

"No shark come, Willie?" cried the skipper sympathetically. "Too bad! Well, we fix that!" He picked up the concertina at his side; two of the sailors reached for their guitars, and the others procured empty five-gallon kerosene tins for tom-toms. "We play *ute*" (chant) "to make *mao*" (shark) "come. *Ute outou!* Everybody sing!"

For five minutes the skipper and his sailors filled the still hot air with a barbaric, boisterous shark-chant. Some of the lethargic sailors, inspired by the hubbub, sprang to their feet and began a strange and furious dance on the deck, imitating a shark-fight. The schooner's deck reverberated with the vehement slaps of bare feet on the planking.

The skipper suddenly held up his hand; the music came to an abrupt stop, and he pointed out to sea. Lo, there I saw the large fin of a shark!

"By cripes, yais, Willie!" he shouted, giving me a knowing wink. "I think shark *ute* hokay! Plentay big shark!"

I quickly inserted the fifteen-foot pole into the socket of the quintuple harpoon, saw that the ferro-bronze chain with its

Shark

And plenty excitement harpooning them.

By WILMON MENARD

two-hundred-foot length of three-quarter-inch manila line was secure, then took up my position at the bow. The shark, fully seventeen feet long, slid up stealthily under the counter of the schooner, remained there a few minutes, then cruised slowly forward, gobbling up the fragments of bait as it progressed. I nervously waited, but it turned back just as it came within striking distance, and returned below the counter of the schooner. I had a sailor toss over more bait, and the shark came out slowly again to eat. This time it came right below me, and I put all my weight on the hard thrust of the harpoon. The blades sank deeply behind the gill openings; and the monster, as if shot from a catapult, started its wild headlong charge away from the schooner. The line pulled out so swiftly that it ate a groove in the gunwale and began smoking. A sailor quickly poured a bucket of sea-water onto the whizzing line to keep it from bursting into flame. The killer pulled out about a hundred yards of line before it suddenly stopped.

"Quick!" I yelled. "Reel in the line!"

HE began spinning the huge cob-winder I had set up on deck, rapidly taking in the slack. I was apprehensive of the shark's entangling itself in the line and snapping it with his savage barrel-rollings and lunges, or biting it through and escaping. The killer reversed his course, and by a miracle kept free of being fouled in the coils of line. In this interval I had an opportunity to throw a few turns around the bow-cleat. It dragged the schooner for about a hundred feet before it finally wearied and went to the bottom to sulk. But I had a remedy for this. I tied a heavy spiked iron ball by its sliding-loop to the line and let it drop heavily by its own weight to where the shark rested. By violently jerking up on the cord attached to the spiked "persuader" I spurred the shark until I had him running wildly again near the surface. Some shark-hunters say a crab, sent down the line to a stubborn man-eater on the bottom, will pinch his gills or snout and make him move; but I tried this a few times and found that I was only feeding the tired shark, because the crab was always bitten cleanly off the cord when I wound it in. My shark, roused by the irritating "prompter," burst through the surface of the sea, churning the water to a white froth. The fight was on once more! But it soon went below again, and after ten minutes' tussle on the surface, I had to use my spiked ball again. But finally the shark became exhausted, as did all of us, and we wearily pulled it in.

What a brute it was! It measured more than seventeen feet—a killer if there ever was one!

A FEW days after harpooning this shark, I saw some "tigers" attacking three rays off the reefs of Hao. It was a lusty fight while it lasted, the leopard rays savagely beating the surface of the sea until it boiled as if in eruption, while they made futile attempts to protect themselves against the savage rushes of the monsters. But each charge of the killers tore away great hunks of the triangular flattened white bodies covered with innumerable grayish-blue circles and dots. The rays' long tails, some six and ten feet long, whipped out of the water and speared the sharks. The barbed daggers were driven so deeply into the sharks' hides that the three-hundred-pound rays could not extricate them, and the violent thrashings and rollings of the sharks broke off six and seven inches of the stings in their bodies.

The natives asked me, as a special favor, not to hunt the great blue shark. This species, they firmly believed, was not of a rapacious nature, and were supposed to be protected by Tané, a powerful god of the sea, who would severely punish anyone molesting them.

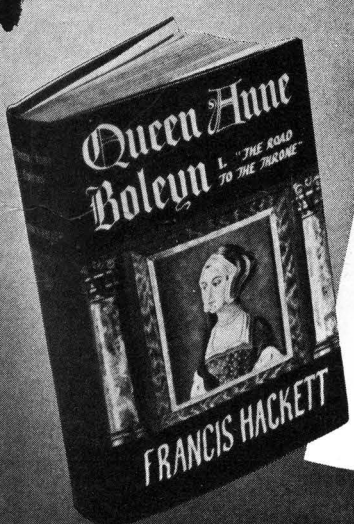
The young boys of Hao indulged in an extremely dangerous form of shark-fishing, which sometimes ended disastrously for some of these Polynesian sportsmen. Perceiving a shark isolated from the others, one of the lads would dive under it, with scarcely a ripple to mark his descent. In his hand he would hold a length of coconut-fiber rope, formed in a noose, which those watching through a water-box on the reef above would pay out to him, as he dropped quietly down through the clear water. Approaching the dozing shark from behind, he would skillfully slip the loop over its large tail. Imagine

the skill required for this underwater swimming so as not to arouse the killer! Then, swimming below the shark forward, unsheathing his knife, he would give the man-eater a sharp rap on its snout with the knife-handle. Surprised and angered, the shark would charge the boy, only to find its tail caught. Those watching on the coral reef above, had jerked the noose tightly around its tail. The young diver, his work finished, would then swim quickly upward out of reach of the enraged shark. The ensuing battle between the boys and the lassoed shark would be exciting and ferocious, but the tiger of the sea, after a wild and desperate struggle, would be finally hauled upon the coral reef, where the lads would kill it with spears and clubs.

The barracuda is perhaps the only real menace the shark has in tropical waters, although another enemy is the *Diodon antennatus*, which has a diabolical method in killing a shark. In size and mien, the *Diodon* is a pleasant-enough fellow, under normal conditions. But if a larger fish, such as the shark, gobbles him up, he'll sorely regret it. Surprised or angered, the *Diodon* can blow itself up by taking in air and water, erecting and distending the long, thorny knobs on its body, and look and act like a veritable nightmare of the sea. It can wheeze and snort like an angry asthmatic old man; it can grind its teeth savagely, and will squirt water out of its mouth, blinding its enemies at a distance of three feet. What if a shark swallows *Diodon* by mistake, while the latter is in its natural proportions? Well, the *Diodon* inflates itself to hideous proportions in the shark's stomach, spews out a carmine liquid, which gives the shark acute belly cramps, and then gnaws its way through the stomach-lining and hide, and swims indignantly off. Which, of course, leaves Señor Shark scuttled and dead.

Tomorrow's Exciting Literary Events are in Today's REDBOOK

for instance:



FRANCIS HACKETT
now tells the glamorous story of **ANNE BOLEYN**

"Henry the Eighth" was one of the most triumphant books of its year. Called "beyond challenge" in interest and "a magnificent pageant," it took America by storm. Redbook is fortunate to present to its readers the new "Hackett" prior to its publication in book form. This time Francis Hackett tells the warmly dramatic and romantically intense story of "Queen Anne Boleyn." The magazine version has been condensed to two parts of 50,000 words each. The first part, "The Road to the Throne" appears complete in August Redbook.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM
begins one of his greatest novels

A novel by the author of "Of Human Bondage" is a rare event. Rare, because he does not write many, and because he writes them supremely well. "Christmas Holiday" is Somerset Maugham's first novel in three years. It gives the truly great account of a young man's sudden and violent introduction to life. Don't miss it.

Other Star Fiction by

JAMES NORMAN HALL:
"Dr. Dogbody's Leg." The great liar in his best form.

GLADYS HASTY CARROLL:
"His Garden Still Bloomed"

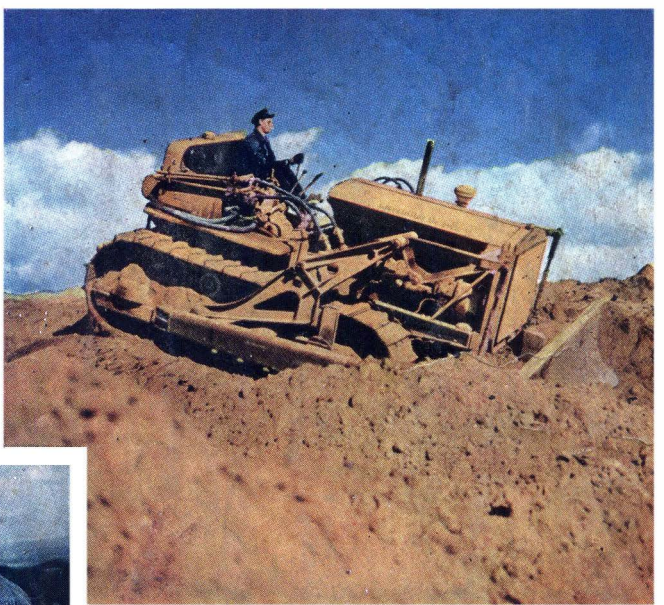
URSULA PARROTT:
"World's Fair" continues

ROSE FRANKEN:
A novelette about "Claudia & David"

"I give Camels first place for good taste and mildness too"

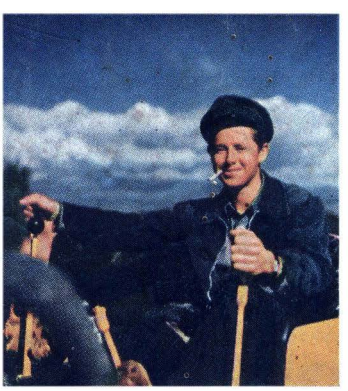
—H. L. McNichols of the California Mountain Fire Patrol

H. L. McNICHOLS works on mountain fire patrol in southern California—fights fire with a tractor. Last fall Patrol No. 2 caught the report: "A blaze along a 6-mile front!" "Mac" drove directly into the flames... time and again ... battled on 18-hour shifts for 5 days. No wonder fellows with tough jobs like to get the best of smoking pleasure out of their cigarette. "Camels are smoother, mellower," says "Mac." "They add a lot of enjoyment to living."



BUILDING A FIRE-BREAK. Operators of these powerful Diesel caterpillars are called "skinners." McNichols must negotiate treacherous slopes ... as he handles this mighty machine that takes rocks ... brush ... trees in its stride at a steady ¼ m.p.h.

"MAC" chats with a fireman friend who shares his liking for Camels. "I'm sold on Camels and so are most of my friends," he says. Try Camels—smoke 6 packs and give your taste a chance to appreciate why Camels are the most popular cigarette in the U. S. A.



AT THE CONTROLS of 16 tons of ripping, tearing Diesel power: McNichols enjoys happy smoking on the job. Let up and light up a smooth, mellow Camel yourself, and enjoy a matchless blend of finer, more expensive tobaccos—Turkish and Domestic.

FOR SMOKING PLEASURE AT ITS BEST...

Let up—Light up a Camel

the Cigarette of Costlier Tobaccos